MODERN FIX

51

FREE

HELLA

Bullet For My Valentine Margaret Cho Ulver
Arab Strap Thrice Boy Sets Fire Wumpscut
Sage Francis Johnny Temple Metric Editors
Opeth BearvsShark Metal Hearts Numbers
Blaq Poet On Broken Wings The Tossers
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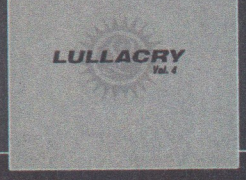

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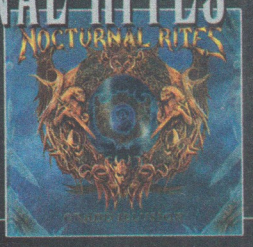

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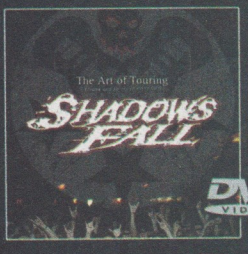

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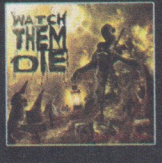

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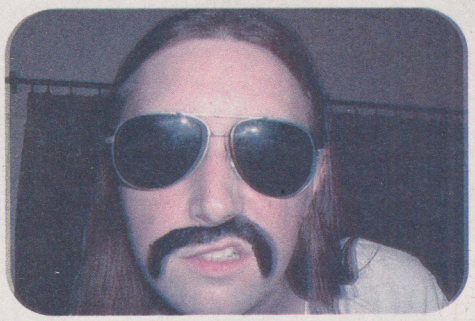
contributors

While he performs weekly at San Diego's Comedy Store, most would recognize **Gordon Downs** from the David Cross's DVD *Let America Laugh,* as the drunk journalist. He's been pitching Hella [page 44] for the cover since 2004, and is that surprising? The man stays up 'till 4am smoking Humboldt hash and watching Nick at Nite. He's a mess, which is also probably why it took him two handfuls of Klonopin and three extra weeks to finish all his writing this month.



Funny story. We're all backstage with **DICK** and the band Subhumans before their show. While his wife was on-stage (she's the vocalist for Naked Aggression), Dick is completely wasted and attempting to find a cigarette. Grabbing some random person by the shoulders, he starts shaking her and shouting orders to get Marlboros. Luckily, someone opening a pack nearby caught his eye, giving her time to escape. Truth be told, he's a fun drunk, and knows his politics. [page 13]

When an unsigned band sends us their CD, we stick it in special 'unsigned' box. About every three months, UPS delivers this box of mostly shitty bands to **Brian Greenaway**'s house. What would you do if someone sent you 200 unsigned band CD's every three months? Build a fort? Before Brian starts construction, he listens to each album and writers a single line of hope... or brutal reality. We print this list [page 88] because fuck, all bands need love. Even if they suck.

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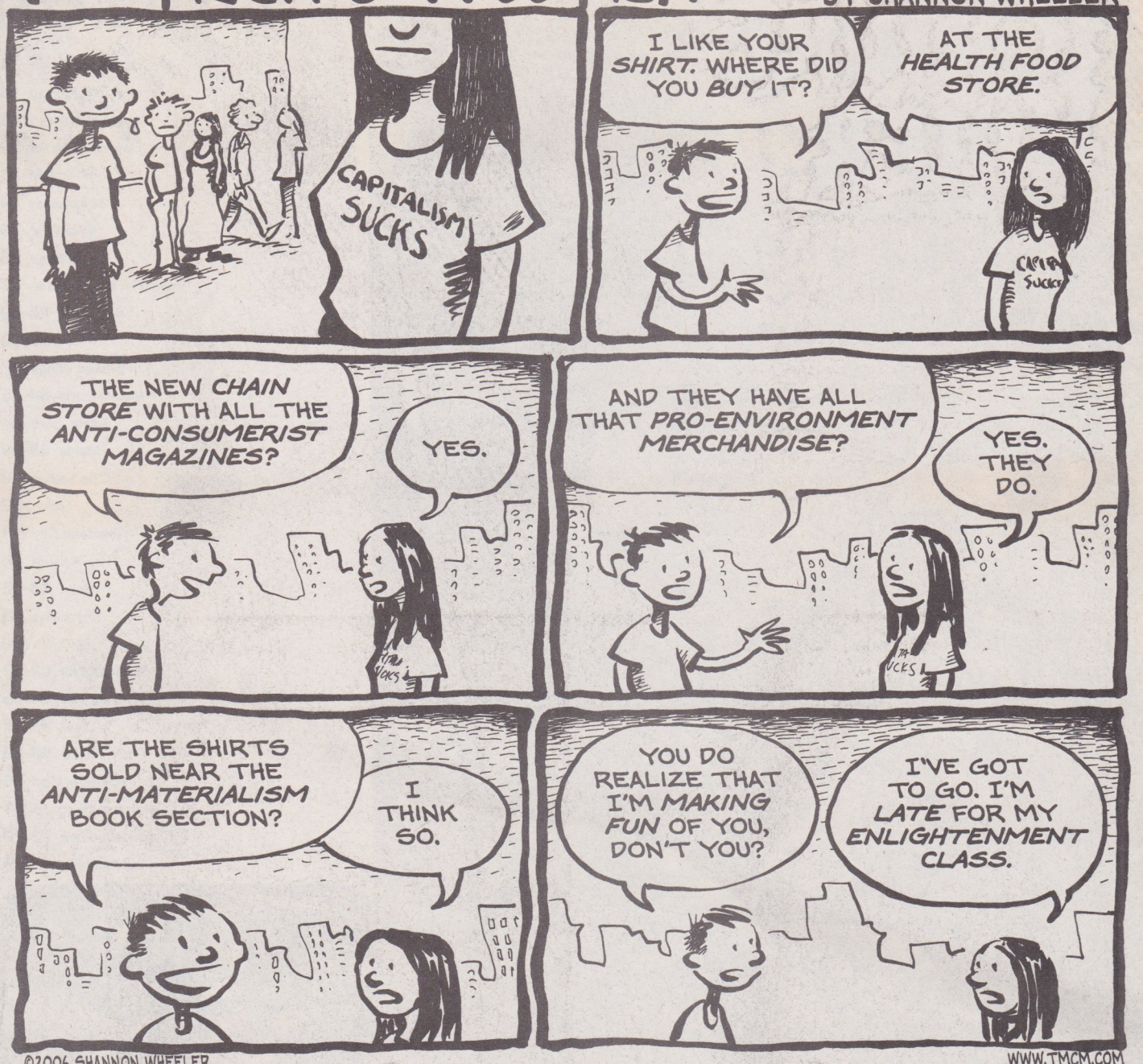
Too Much Coffee Man

BY SHANNON WHEELER



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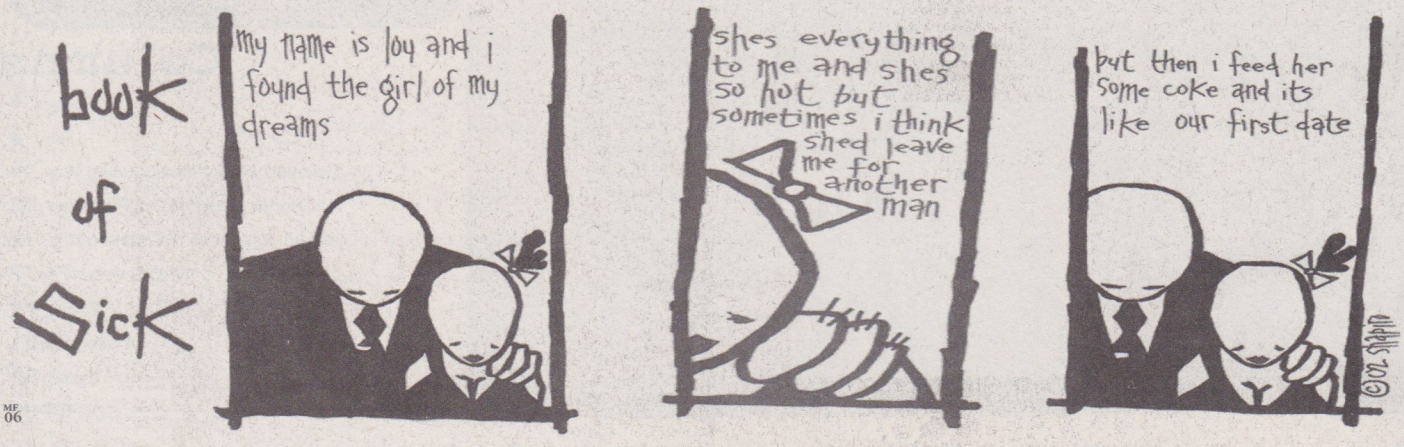

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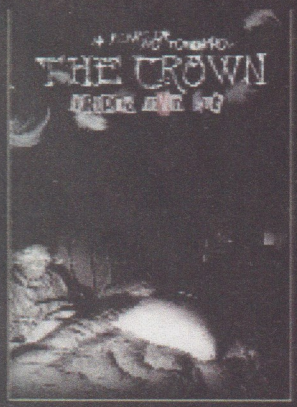

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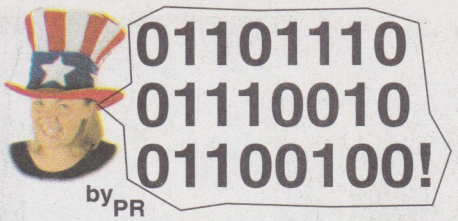


Color! Woot!

As director of the Boston University's Remote Sensing Center, Farouk El-Baz could also be labeled a detective. Since the 1930's, scientists have been baffled on explaining why a portion of Egypt's southern desert is littered with yellowish-green glass fragments, from tiny granules to football-sized chunks of the stuff, all containing extra-terrestrial-originated isotopes inside the glass's silica. El Baz, after heavy examination of satellite images of the Sahara Desert, has found a **huge crater** at the southern tip of Egypt. And when I say huge, I mean huge. 1 19 fucking miles across! Much bigger than that tiny Barringer crater in Arizona (you know, the one that was in *Starman*). Imagine the size of the meteor that was needed to make that impact crater. Damn.

Familiar with the **Gaia theory**? Hypothesized by the scientist Sir James Lovelock in the 1960's, the basic premise is that all living matter on Earth functions together like a single organism. He named this organism Gaia after the greek Goddess. As a human deals and works with biological properties (bacteria living on/in us) we're able to co-exist with these 'non-human' inhabitants. The same goes with Earth, but on a much wider scale. Critics are quick to point out that the Gaia has not reproduced as an organism would, but the counter is that while that may be true, future space travel will allow colonization of another planet, which is sort of the same thing. Anyways, Lovelock recently wrote an editorial for United Kingdom's *The Independent*, and, well, he thinks we're all pretty much fucked. A snip: *Our planet has kept itself healthy and fit for life, just like an animal does, for most of the more than three billion years of its existence. It was ill luck that we started polluting at a time when the sun is too hot for comfort. We have given Gaia a fever and soon her condition will worsen to a state like a coma. She has been there before and recovered, but it took more than 100,000 years. We are responsible and will suffer the consequences: as the century progresses, the temperature will rise 8 degrees centigrade in temperate regions and 5 degrees in the tropics. Much of the tropical land mass will become scrub and desert, and will no longer serve for regulation; this adds to the 40 per cent of the Earth's surface we have depleted to feed ourselves. Curiously, aerosol pollution of the northern hemisphere reduces global warming by reflecting sunlight back to space. This "global dimming" is transient and could disappear in a few days like the smoke that it is, leaving us fully exposed to the heat of the global greenhouse. We are in a fool's climate, accidentally kept cool by smoke, and before this century is over billions of us will die and the few breeding pairs of people that survive will be in the Arctic where the climate remains tolerable.*

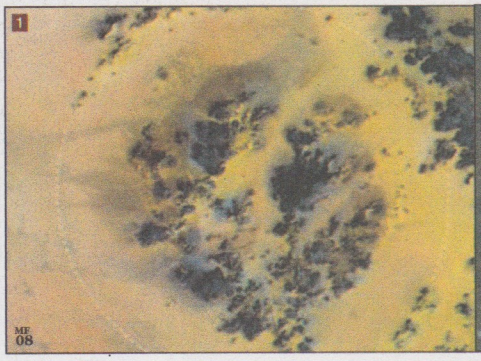
You probably didn't know that six years ago, **Neil Bush** (yep, George's younger brother) was a founding board member of The Foundation for Interreligious and Intercultural Research and Dialogue. Guess who else was a member? Then-cardinal and now big shot, Pope Joseph Ratzinger. This only raises eyebrows by the fact that Neil Bush has never been known to be the religious type. After all, he admitted in his 2004 divorce proceedings to, on at least three occasions, having sex with hookers while staying at a hotel in Asia. Wait, maybe he really IS religious.

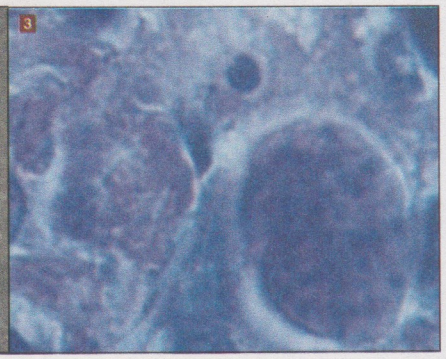
Lead researcher Leah D. Whigham at the department of Nutritional Sciences at the University of Wisconsin has announced, after findings from new research, that **obesity may be contagious**. Her research team found that the human adenovirus Ad-37 triggers obesity in chickens. This is in addition to earlier evidence that suggests Ad-36 and Ad-5, also cause obesity in animals. The adenovirus is a frequent cause of common colds and airborne illnesses. These tend to "increase the fat in the fat cells," Whigham said, and "There is quite a bit of already published data with Ad-36 and its association with obesity. If you look at obese people, more of them have antibodies to Ad-36 than lean people." If research progresses, someday there may be a vaccine against obesity to target these viruses. "A great way to handle the [obesity] epidemic is to come up with a vaccine. We are still a long way from that, because first we have to know how many of the human adenoviruses cause obesity."

Ever hear of the **Toynbee Tiles**? 2 Basically, since the early 1980's, person(s) unknown have spread football sized (but sometimes bigger) artwork across America and around the world. The design itself is pretty basic, and the messages tend to revolve around the Stanley Kubrick films, 2001 and 2010, usually something along the lines of "TOYNBEE IDEA, IN MOVIE 2001, RESURRECT DEAD ON PLANET JUPITER" Some of the works have much more detailed 'messages', with all sorts of crazy ramblings. What's most interesting is how the tiles are displayed. They're always on the street, and use a combination of linoleum, glue, asphalt crack filler and tar paper. The tile is laid onto the asphalt of the street face up, with the tar paper covering the message. As days go, with the heat of the sun and the weight of the cars, the message is permanently embedded into the street. The tar paper gradually wears away from car tires, revealing the message. Do a search on the internet; many people have taken pictures of them in their own city, and post locations to find them if a sign is near you.

Toxoplasma gondii, a common parasite, 3 has a pretty interesting life cycle. The toxoplasma usually infects its host and forms cysts in the brain, but when it's present in rats, it alters their behavior. That is, it makes the rat unafraid of cat urine. The average rat will bolt on the first hint of a cat around, but toxoplasma-infected rats will not only stick around, they actually seek out spots that reek of cat urine. The theory is that to infect something that would eat their current host (and allow them to infect something bigger) you need to keep the prey alive. A dead host won't pass it's parasites. Currently deemed a 'harmless' parasite, toxoplasma's are present in half of the worlds population. A heavy toxoplasma infections has been associated with damaging astrocytes, which are nerve cells that protect neurons. The disease schizophrenia also damages neurons. When Dr. E. Fuller Torrey and others treated infected rats with haloperidol, a antipsychotic medication, their fear of cat urine was completely restored, mimicking what happens when infected rats are treated with pyrimethamine, a toxoplasma-specific drug treatment.

Although pretty much ignored by all mainstream press, the discussion is still going on about Colonel Janis Karpinski's descriptions of what is happening in Iraq. Last month Karpinski spoke to a panel in New York (the Commission of Inquiry for Crimes Against Humanity Committed by the Bush Administration) and told not only of the torture of detainees, but apparently American women soldiers as well. According to her, **several women have died of dehydration in Iraq** because they refused to drink liquids late in the day (when temperatures are in the mid 110-120 degrees) because they were afraid of being assaulted by male soldiers if they had to use the latrine after dark. Yes, you read that right. "There were no lights near any of their facilities, so women were doubly easy targets in the dark," Karpinski said. "Maj. Gen. Walter Wojdakowski, America's top deputy in Iraq, saw "dehydration" listed as the cause of death on the death certificate of a female master sergeant in September 2003 and under orders from his boss, he directed that the cause of death no longer be listed", Karpinski stated. "That's how Rumsfeld works," she said. Last year, Karpinski told a group of students at Thomas Jefferson School of Law about an 800 number women could use to report sexual assaults. "But no one had a phone," she added. "And no one answered that number, which was based in the United States. Any woman who successfully connected to it would get a recording. Even after more than 83 incidents were reported during a six-month period in Iraq and Kuwait, the 24-hour rape hot line was still answered by a machine that told callers to leave a message." Words escape me.





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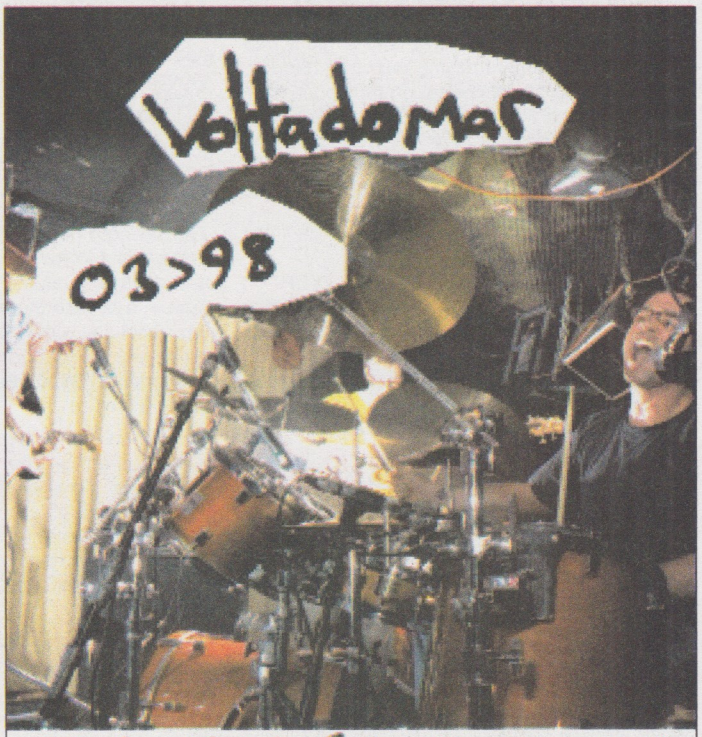

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"The biggest threat to America today is not Communism; it's moving America towards a fascist theocracy."
– Frank Zappa, 1986, on CNN's Crossfire.

by Dick

It is 1986. Reagan has been in power for six years, and all kinds of crazy crap is afoot with the Iran Contra affair embroiling the administration in scandal on one hand, and a giant pro-censorship movement raising the other hand up in obfuscation. My father sat on the couch turning the pages in the Reader's Digest. Our president and his administration are selling out the people of the United States by selling arms to the enemy, Iran, but my father has bigger, more pressing concerns on his mind.

"Do you listen to Slayer?" he asks.

My ears prick up. Did he just say "SLAYER"? I drag my eyes slowly off the page of my reading material like nails across a chalkboard. I'm two-thirds of the way through Steven King's opening story in Skeleton Crew. The Mist is a hard one to break away from, but Slayer easily wins out. Why is my dad asking me about Slayer?

"Yes," I say.

"Severing flesh, gouging eyes, tearing limb from limb," he reads, "That's what they sing?"

I think about that for a moment, questing through the index of songs in my head. I find the song, Necrophobic, and hear Tom Araya belt it out.

"Yes," I say. "It has that in there?" I indicate the Reader's Digest. "Why is Slayer in there?" Could I have been wrong about the Reader's Digest? Was it more than a bunch of inspirational homilies for God-fearing illiterates? Was the Digest hip to metal? Shit, not even Rolling Stone was hip to metal. Not even MTV got heavy metal! I couldn't be wrong. Something was rotten for sure.

"Do you listen to Megadeth?" my father asked, ignoring my question.

"Yeah," I say and wonder what lyrical tidbit he'll read me this time.

"How about Motley Crue?" he asks.

"No," I answer. "Do they have any Megadeth lyrics in there?"

"Bodies convulse in agony and pain I mangle their faces until no features remain [...] first take out the organs then cut off their heads," he reads.

My pulse quickens. This isn't good. He just read the lyrics to Megadeth's best fucking song! And he read them out of Reader's Digest.

That day, lying in a ray of sunshine splashed across the yellow shag carpet, is when I learned about the PMRC.

The PMRC was attacking all kinds of music, including such pop artist's like Prince, Madonna, and the disgustingly vile, Cyndi Lauper, but the bulk of their attack and their greatest ferocity was leveled against metal. They claimed heavy metal advocated incest, rape, bestiality, necrophilia, murder, prostitution and a wide array of violent criminal activities and sex acts.

They hated only the Dead Kennedy's more than heavy metal, and to avoid confusion amongst themselves, they usually just went ahead and called the Dead Kennedy's a heavy metal band... and I'm glad they did. I started listening to the Dead Kennedy's because of that erroneous classification (the CIA would call that blowback).

The far-right honed their argument in the '80s, using metal to symbolize the corruption of youth and decaying values. Metal became the straw-man in a debate that was really about demonizing absolutist views on the first amendment in order to push an agenda of radical conservative censorship. What they learned then is being applied now.

Straw-men are set up across the cultural battlefield. Far-left secular forces are out to destroy Christmas. The belief's of the left are "a culture of death" and, please, never mind who supports the death penalty, justifies torture and wages war. As usual, the right must call their political struggles a war... 1,2,3,4 I declare a "culture war!"

And the enemy isn't heavy metal this time; it's everyone who doesn't march lockstep with the Bush administration... especially those dirty pink-o liberals.

The "culture war" is a war on liberalism. Liberals are unpatriotic. The leftist elements of this country hate America and "blame America first". The right makes its lies, the truth is spun out of control and it all gets irresponsibly played off as the news.

Left-leaning and/or centrist organizations like the ACLU, FAIR, Media Matters and moveon.org are the enemies that promote un-American values just as Motley Crue and Twisted Sister were the enemies destroying family values.

In Deena Weinstein's book, "Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture", she brings up the subject of "ideological terrorism."

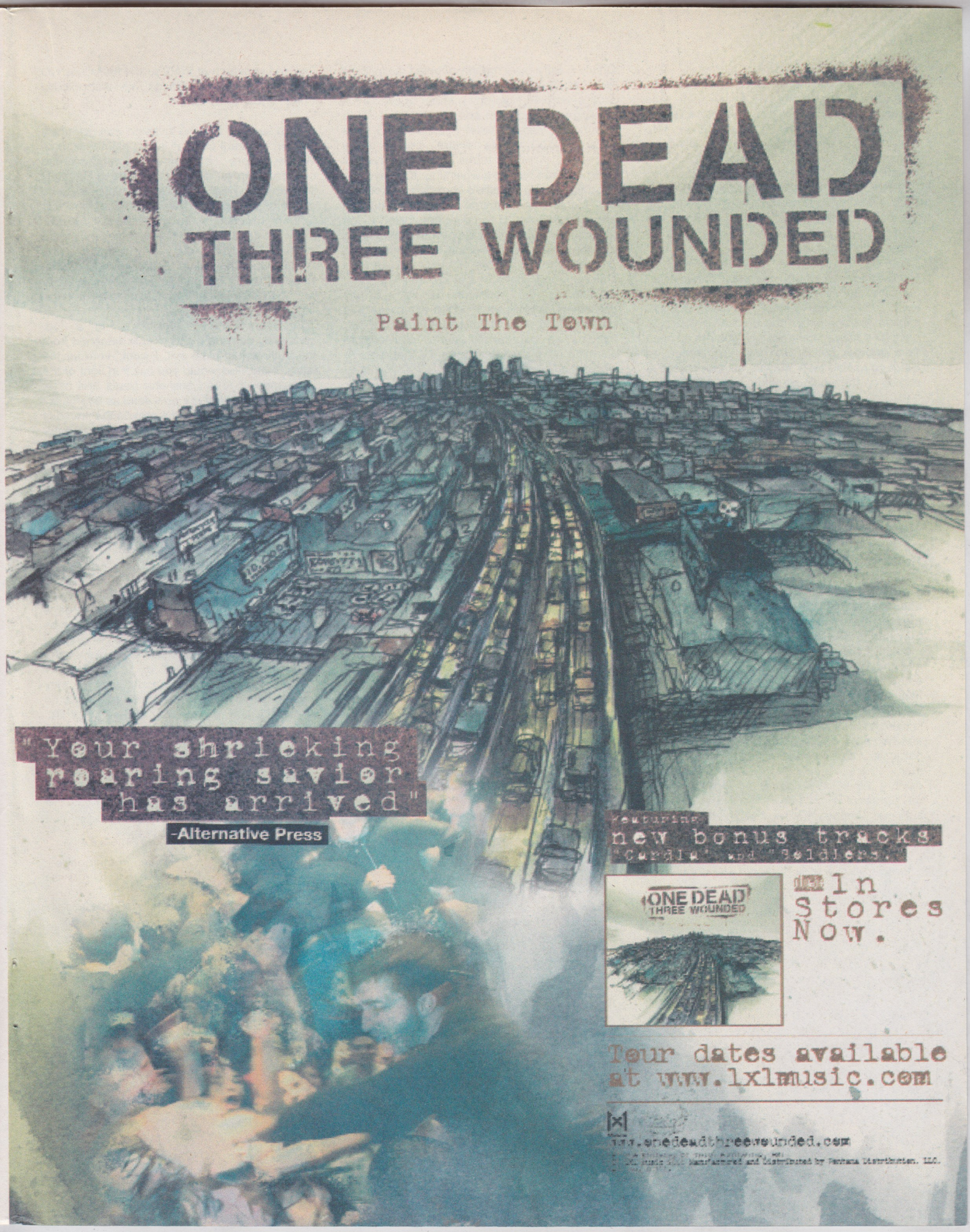
Deena writes: "When an interest is not granted serious consideration [...] it can be characterized in any way by the dominant discourse and that discourse will meet no resistance, even if it systematically mischaracterizes that interest." (Ch. 7 pg. 273 – rev. ed.)

Deena is writing about heavy metal and its detractors, but the term "ideological terrorism" fits the current right-wing dominated media and its growing hostility towards the left.

First, the right worked for years to viciously malign and demonize not liberals as human beings, per se, but the word. In the dominant discourse in this country, "Liberal" has come to signify all that is un-American. Once they had "liberal" thus defined, they can freely attach all sorts of lies and misrepresentations to any liberal cause or agenda. Further, in a two party system, once the left side is villainized as un-American, it follows clearly through that the other side, the conservative right, are our American heroes, and they can justify all their crimes as good for the people, as what needs to be done for America, as patriotic, brave, true, and strong. Intelligent Design must be taught in school. Only liberal secular scientists would say otherwise. Wiretapping? Our own government spying on its citizens? It's for the good of America. Liberals want to make a big deal out of it because they hate the president and they hate America.

More ground can even be gained in their ongoing war against the first amendment, with laws making it illegal to anonymously transmit material on the internet with the "intent to annoy" (House Resolution 3402; Sec. 113). The "annoy" clause could go down in history as a major step in eroding the first amendment out from under us. To use one of the right-wing's favorite expressions, "It's a slippery slope," this annoying in anonymity business. With that, I think we can bring this full circle, back 'round to heavy metal, to annoy in anonymity, sounds like GWAR to me. America must be destroyed, indeed.

"The biggest threat to America today is not terrorism; it's moving America towards a fascist theocracy."
– Dick, 2006, Modern Fix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by Anthony Happel

Former NSA director, Lt. Gen. William Odom, said the Bush administration invasion and occupation of Iraq is "the greatest strategic disaster in U.S. history." Can't get much more succinct than that. While there may be other militaristic exercises that have certainly proven disastrous for this country, many of them, ironically, as the result of ham-fisted, half-hearted attempts at "promoting (American) democracy", there doesn't come to mind, at the moment, any particular one that is glaringly worse than this one.

What do I mean when I say that? That's a fair question. Before I go on to indict Bush and his team for their war crimes I should, at least, explain the context of the crimes. If you step back for a moment and pretend you are an alien from another galaxy that has just landed on Earth you could then, maybe, take an objective stance on the whole situation. Let's try.

In the fall of 2001 Iraq had been in a funk for a decade resulting from the destruction of huge portions of their infrastructure during the Persian Gulf War, coupled with an embargo by the west and Hussein's continued neglect of the people at the expense of his "ministers" of bullshit. Their invasion of Kuwait had brought the wrath of the world down upon the Hussein regime, but first and foremost it brought down the wrath of Washington and it's coterie of new Republican, neo-con hawks.

The trade embargo placed upon the country after the war did little or nothing to the Hussein regime, other than alter the specifics of who they had to deal with on the geo-political black market. It did not affect the status of Hussein and the Ba'ath Party, in fact, what it did was embolden many of the very people Hussein kept under his fist to support him against the U.S. with even greater fervor. He painted himself as a victim of U.S. and western polices and he called on his people to worship him as part of a cult of personality that is eerily like so many others we saw emerge in the twentieth century. What the embargo did was to further devastate a population that was already suffering horribly from the brutality of wars with Iran in the 80s, and the rest of the world in the 90s.

Children were most harshly affected, as millions went without basic necessities and tens of thousands died from any number of conditions relating to malnutrition and the inability to cure common illnesses. Relief agencies who were present during this entire period have expressed in poetic terms how the waves of dead children was overwhelming. It is revolting to think about the media's complicity in keeping this fact of the embargo from the American people. While the U.S. politicians talked tough against Hussein, and in support of their polices and the "no-fly zone", the only real action on the ground was the murder of thousands of Iraqi children and babies by commission and omission. If the American people had any collective political soul or will at all, that should be enough to make them see through the lies. Instead we roll merrily along, oblivious to anything other than what's on TV that night or who J. Lo is bedding.

Hussein entrenched himself in power after the war by raising the stakes for members of his inner circle, and the so-called elite Republican Guard. He called on his courtiers to rally around him. The real soldiers in Hussein's army were, not unlike the Iranian soldiers they fought against, wiped out after their protracted war with Iran, and the after-affect on the army was still being felt when the U.S. invaded in 2003. The elite officer corps of the Republican Guard, on the other hand, the ones from the inner circle, were over-fed yes men of Hussein. None of them were the type he could count on to stand and fight if it got ugly. Much like Caligula, Hussein knew his power was fake. He knew he didn't have the kind of loyal men around him who would stand on principal, because they had become serious operators in the global geo-political gangsterism that all nations participate in, and that bred both the kind of realist who knew what the real Saddam was after, and the kind of bloodthirsty pol that is only out for himself in the end anyway.

The eyes of the entire world were on Saddam and the weapons inspectors were there to complete their mission. They should have been allowed to do so. Instead the Bush team rushed to war out of a whole series of specious motives. There is no legitimate reason to have invaded in search of WMDs, and there was NO DIRECT LINK to Al-qaeda, so that excuse doesn't hold water either.

And to suggest that the invasion was ultimately to "free the Iraqi people" is just plain ludicrous. Where were all these compassionate conservatives for the past 30 years of Ba-athist repression? They didn't give a tinker's damn about the people of Iraq when Saddam was torturing his countrymen and gassing the Kurds. They are flat our lying when they say they were moved to act out of concern and compassion.They didn't care one lick what Saddam did to his people when he was allied with the U.S. against Iran. Case closed.

The Bush administration lives in a fog, constantly denying reality, totally detached from the truth or just plain evil. I would vote for the latter. What else would you call it in light of the thousands of Americans and Iraqis and other coalition forces that are now dead as doornails? What else would you call a regime that invades another country and starts an unprovoked war? Wouldn't you call them evil if they were Arab or Eastern European or African? Of course you would. By the way, have those numbers begun to sink in to the psyche of the American people? I don't think so. Do most Americans comprehend what it means for there to be tens of thousands of dead Iraqis while we declare we're there to bring "democracy" to the Iraqi people?

My explanation for what is to be done begins with the removal of U.S. ground troops (the ones who get blown up by roadside bombs while on patrol), from the center of the circle of death as quickly as possible while implementing new measures to beef up Iraqi security personnel with the training and equipment they need to take over this fight. What that would do is take the U.S. soldiers out of the line of fire. Remove them from being sitting ducks that can be attacked anytime, anywhere and killed or wounded with explosive devices that they cannot possibly detect. If you take the U.S. troops out of the line of fire it gives the insurgents a much different picture of "occupation" and it reduces the bloodshed and death toll immediately. Guaranteed.

THE PULL-OUT FROM IRAQ

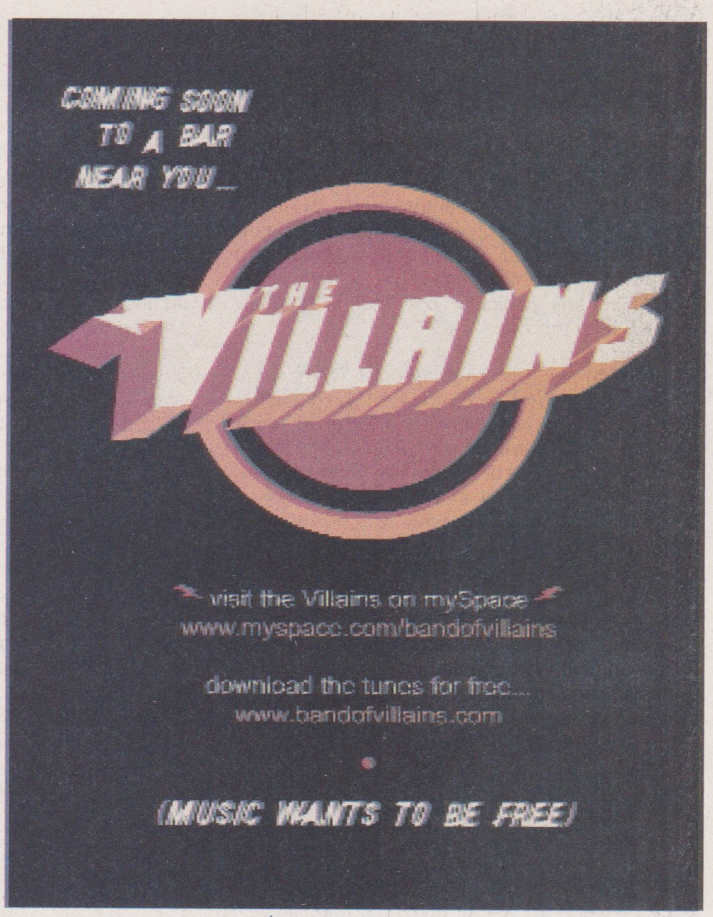
The idea that the insurgents will ramp up the terror on the civilians is far-fetched. Their agenda has been one of a mixed bag of targeting installations and buildings that have some political and military significance. When they explode a car bomb outside of a police training facility they are targeting several things: the institutional symbol of the building itself, the idea of a new ruling programme and the people, both civilian and military, who work in and around it. If you pull U.S. forces back you don't openly tell anyone how many, or how soon, and you certainly don't let on exactly how many Iraqi security personnel are trained and ready to roll.

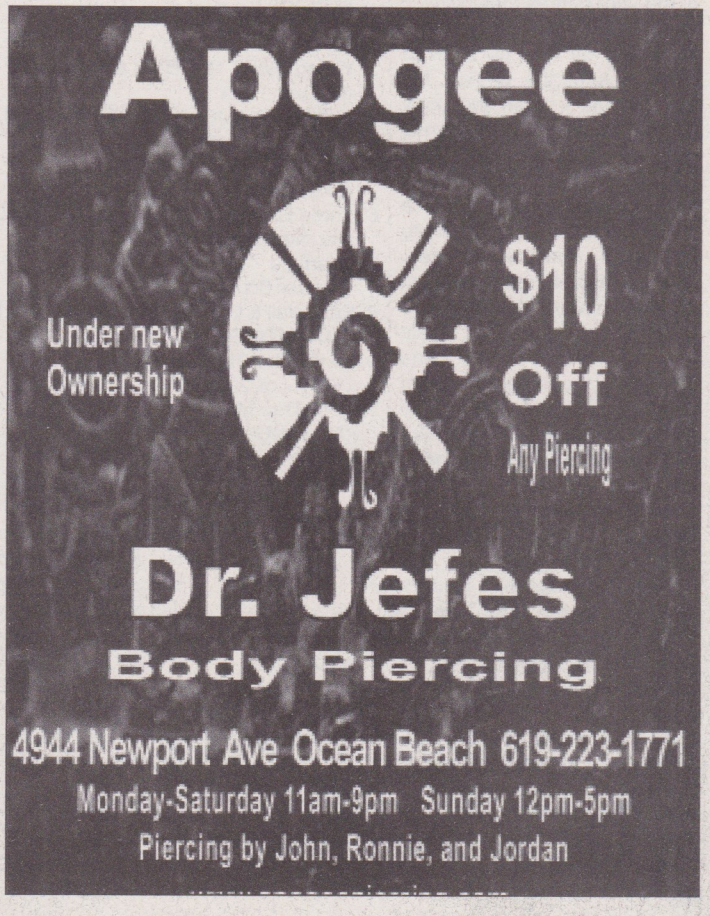
THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION LIVES IN A FOG CONSTANTLY DENYING REALITY

You outsmart the insurgency by pulling back forces incrementally, and replacing them with a new plan for defending the military infrastructure. American and British advisers would remain, probably for years to come, because we broke it and we own the damn thing now, but at least the soldiers on the ground, the ones all the right-wing "patriots" get so teary over, would start to come home. That would be supporting the troops, in a smart, effective way. And there's nothing cowardly or defeatist about it. It's just smart policy. No honest commander wants to continue to see soldiers die if it can be helped. Now it can be helped. But Bush doesn't have the brains or the integrity to do it, because he's a weasel and a gangster himself.

The insurgents won't know when the Americans are leaving a region, how quickly or what will be there to replace them. That will buy time for the Iraqis to get up to speed with more soldiers and cops of their own. Perhaps if the Bush people hadn't completely disbanded the Iraqi Army the job of finding at least a few thousand more soldiers who were willing to join the coalition might have been accomplished already. Another huge Bush blunder. As it stands they kept telling us, especially "Yummy Rummy", how many Iraqis are participating in the maneuvers but we sure aren't seeing much in the way of real news about handing over jurisdiction anytime soon. No coincidence there. This Iraqi constitution is a sham, and this new government is a puppet regime of U.S. making. And it's beginning to resemble a theocracy.

We've won the preliminary stages of this war, the overthrow of Baghdad, the sacking of Saddam's regime, the capture of the head of the beast. Now is time for shrewd policy, swift diplomacy and smart military tactics, all things the Bush team are incapable of, or uninterested in, providing for the soldiers, the people of Iraq and for us. With rumblings about more invasions and regime change in Iran and Syria we are all well on our way down to the bottomless pit of Hell. Americans who back this loathsome cowboy deserve everything that's coming to them. But what about the rest of us. We didn't ask for this shit, and we're powerless to stop it. Some democracy. It's no wonder democracy rhymes with hypocrisy. If there is such a concept as real justice in the afterlife, Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice, Rove, Wolfowitz, Pearle and the lot of them will be dancing the white hot samba with Pinochet, Marcos, Pahlavi, Batista, Noriega, Duvalier, Samoza and the one and only Saddam Hussein, former U.S. ally and friend to thieving capitalists everywhere.





I LIKE RAP: ignorance of southern rap

by Andrew Nosnitsky

You've probably been on one side of the conversation at some point. I don't fool with that dirty south shit, it's ignorant, it's misogynistic, they can't rap and it all sounds the same. They've ruined rap. And then there's always a token qualifier or two – almost always an except for Outkast, they're cool, sometimes the better informed might also tack UGK, the Geto Boys or even Goodie Mob on to the short list. But the overriding sentiment is always the same – (for the most part) that shit ain't real.

But what is real? Since it's been so embraced by all aspects of pop culture it's easy to forget that hip hop began as a counter culture, almost avant garde musical movement. The earliest hip hop parties and records were all over the place, with no restraint on style or subject or length or really anything. But when a formula finally did solidify, adherence to this standard was sharply enforced in the interest of keeping it real and not getting your membership to KRS-One's hip hop temple revoked. This narrow minded cultural elitism is the very reason that the northeastern artists lost their grip on the national rap market. And now they're mad because motherfuckers who've never been to New York were having a more exciting, ever changing party.

While the New York contingent was stuck with 92 BPM breakbeat loops and "hot" 16 bar battle raps (or, even worse, desperately chasing the trends of the very genres they dismiss as inferior), the South was branching off into all sorts of derivatives of the original hip hop formula - From the party starting call and response ig'nance of Miami bass (2 Live Crew) and it's equally rambunctious cousins Bounce (Juvenile) and crunk (Lil' Jon) to Houston's codeine induced, half speed DJ Screw tapes and Atlanta's newly evolved hyper-minimalist snap music movement ("Laffy Taffy"). And then there's perhaps the most unfairly neglected style of the south – the dense soul territory explored by UGK, the Dungeon Family and Eightball & MJG, informed by just about all of the aforementioned styles, but also by Curtis Mayfield and Willie Mitchell.

To say that southern rappers are somehow inferior probably just means that you haven't been listening very carefully at all. As Lil' Wanye so succinctly put it – "this is southern face it / if we too simple / then y'all don't get the basics." It's an impassioned defense, but it gives the south entirely too little credit. Not only do many southern emcees have the basics mastered, the diverse styles of production they've grown up around has made most of these rappers far more technically adept than their northern counterparts.

10 great Southern albums from the past ten years (that aren't by Outkast)

1. UGK "Ridin' Dirty" (Jive, 1996)
2. Goodie Mob "Still Standing" (La Face, 1998)
3. Young Bleed "My Balls & My Word" (No Limit, 1998)
4. Eightball & MJG "In Our Lifetime Vol. 1" (Suave House, 1999)
5. BG "Chopper City In the Ghetto" (Cash Money, 1999)
6. Three Six Mafia "When The Smoke Clears" (Relativity/Hypnotize Minds, 2000)
7. Scarface "The Fix" (Def Jam South, 2002)
8. Paul Wall & Chamillionaire "Get Your Mind Correct" (Paid In Full, 2002)
9. Devin The Dude "Jus Tryin To Live" (Rap-A-Lot, 2002)
10. TI "Trap Music" (Atlantic/Grand Hustle, 2003)

They can do the traditional northern rap cadence and they can rock triplets like a motherfucker. Where many great NYC rappers would trip up or sound out of place on, say, a Mannie Fresh or Timbaland beat (ask Fat Joe or Mobb Deep's Prodigy or really any NYC rapper who isn't Jay-Z and keeps embarrassing themselves), someone like Ludacris will rock perfectly over that boom bap shit, come back home, and kick some double time flows that will fuck with your brain.

And there's equally diverse with subject matter. There's the political – Goodie Mob can wax paranoid on the constant watch of big brother or Chamillionaire might take crooked cops to task; the spiritual – Scarface and David Banners candid conversations with god; the personal – just about any song by unsung Houston legend Z-Ro; it's humorous – check Devin's self deprecating stoner anthems, the slap a bitch/get slapped back gender battles of the Hypnotize Minds camp or the jokey word play of Young Jeezy. And just about every rapper I just mentioned can circumnavigate many of these subjects without missing a beat. And yeah, they can and do make songs about pussy popping and crack slanging as well. And there ain't a damn thing wrong with that either. Or if there is, that argument can be applied to most rap, across regions, and should probably be saved for another day.

But when you get right down to it, it's redundant, almost nonsensical, to defend southern rap at all, when it sells so many damn units. Few New York rapper shas had even a fraction of the success that dozens of southern rappers have seen since Master P and his No Limit soldiers paved the way for the independent southern hustle in the late 90s. And the two glaring exceptions – Jay-Z & 50 Cent - probably owe at least a fraction of their success to their successions towards a southern audience. Jay's appeared on high profile collaborations with Jeezy, Juvenile and UGK and many his biggest hits have been laced with the sub-Mason-Dixon polyrhythmic productions of Timbaland and the Neptunes. And 50 wasn't moving any units until a bullet in the cheek left him with a conveniently southern sounding drawl., not to mention signing Nashville's Young Buck under his G-Unit umbrella. Ironically, the remainder of New York's best and brightest (The Diplomats, D-Block) are relegated to the same local niche hero status that was once inhabited by southern legends. Sure, New York is a bigger city than Memphis or New Orleans, but in the grand scheme of things that makes little difference.

Only in the bizarre and authenticity obsessed rap world can a movement as genuine and unique as southern rap be dismissed as ignorant while simultaneously selling the most records.

From: Los Angeles, CA
Album: "The Mechanical Hand" (Combat/Koch)
Web: horsetheband.com
Nostalgic Feeling: Making it to Dracula on "Castlevania II: Simon's Quest" with no holy water, one bar of health and the desire to kick some fuckin' ass.
Parental Warning: NES and Horse the Band may induce seizures, but will greatly improve hand-eye coordination.

Second only to The Advantage as having the NES as a major influence, Horse the Band blasts out keyboard driven rock like invisible laser beams aimed at cartoon ducks. While they scream and thrash over keyboard blips, heavy metal guitars kick in for extra power-ups. They will build and build until it feels like looking down over a 1,000 foot cliff before stopping long enough to catch your breath with an eerie keyboard doo-pah doo-pah. Horse the Band is a non-stop assault, like you've been dropped into Contra with no gun and you're up against that purple alien boss. If you're lucky, you'll make it out alive, if not, restart anduse the cheat code, or beg Horse the Band to come and slay the beast for you.

Location: Portland, Oregon
Album: "Standing In The Way Of Control" (Kill Rock Stars)
Web: killrockstars.com
Standing In The Way Of The Salad Bar: The members of Gossip may or may not be vegetarians. Our research team declined to comment on their lack of research.

Ever since Beth Ditto and company arrived on the scene in 1999, The Gossip has been churning out stripped down rock and roll that rivals the sound of Top 40 media darlings the White Stripes. Due to the help of a large following within the gay and lesbian community, their latest release "Standing In The Way Of Control" stands out as The Gossip's best received album since their sophomore release, "Arkansas Heat." Having already done a tour of the states this past fall, expect to see The Gossip on the road again later on this year.

Location: Montreal, Quebec
Album: "Return To The Sea" (Equator)
Web: myspace.com/islandsareforever
Obvious Fact: Despite their success as mystical creatures and harbingers of the greatest holiday of them all (Halloween), Islands are a smart band. Smart in that they won't cough up the dough for a domain name.

From the ashes of The Unicorns rise Islands; a quirky / smart rock jam band that can handle three minute pop tunes or eleven minute guitar driven anthems. Fresh off the Beck tour, they might not be The Unicorns, but the Islands do keep it real. Unfortunately for diehard fans of the former outfit, Max Groadie American Roadie is not in this unique and timeless line-up. Bon Jour.

PBJ
AIRPORT 81

"... the best thing to happen to electronic music in years."
- Neufutur

"... like Pac-Man formed his own punk band."
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separationanxiety

by Dailyn Brown

"Music is my psychiatric drug," Sage Francis belts out over the small but enthusiastic audience. He is wearing a handmade shirt bluntly stating, "Fuck Clear Channel" but this is nothing new from the Rhode Island based rapper. His fiery and rousing words have always just been part of his entertaining stage presence. Sage's raps are full of social commentary and well seasoned beats. His new album, "A Healthy Distrust" is out on Epitaph and the Sol.illiquists of Sound are keeping him company on tour, so what else could a guy need? Maybe just enough time to buy some Broccoli at the grocery store to throw out to the crowd during his classic song, "Climb Trees".

SAGE FRANCIS

...find my inner West Coast self and pat it's back with a whisper and a tear.

How do you feel about Epitaph, being that "A Healthy Distrust" was your first album on that label? Did they influence much of your style?

Sage Francis: I kept Epitaph at a fair distance while putting it all together, they didn't factor into any equation at all. I made the kind of album I wanted to make. When I was done with it and when I felt like it was where I wanted it to be, then I gave it to Epitaph. They would have preferred more, they wanted something radio would have been into. There is no pandering on it whatsoever and I purposefully didn't give them a single on the first album because I didn't want to feel that by going with Epitaph that it was my goal to "sell out". So I made an album that I am really proud of and I knew that there was no song that could be misconstrued as me trying to exploit a situation or them trying to exploit a situation. It was just balls to the wall concept, social commentary and rugged production styles. There is a gloss to the album as well. Sonically it sounds really good and I purposely went from album to album trying to get the best sound possible, but now that I have done that, I really expect my future albums to back peddle a little bit and go more back to a raw aesthetic.

You don't seem to edit yourself and this might influence the way that the mainstream views your music. How does Europe react to you? Are they more open-minded?

I could easily do the radio song. Maybe one day I will do that song and push the limit of it and see how much I can get away with. Surprisingly, many commercial radio stations are still playing songs from. "A Healthy Distrust" even though I think the album has no tracks with radio viability. A few years ago in Europe, they would come to the show to see something brand new and they accepted what I gave to them. At this point, I have cultivated a pretty dedicated fan base in Europe, especially in the UK, but even in Europe where they don't speak English as a first language.

Your lyrics are written with such twisted metaphors. Are you comfortable with the title of 'poet'?

I don't walk around waving a poet flag. I listen to a lot of artists that people call poets. I see poetry in everything, being that writing is my craft. I pay a lot of attention to language. I pay a lot of attention to the tools in writing and I try to better myself as a writer. I wouldn't release a book of poetry at this point in my life. I still don't think I've honed poetry in itself to a degree where I could get away with just writing. Maybe I could, but I am hyper critical of myself, so I think I am more of a rapper then I am a poet. Rap structure, the format of Rap and of songwriting lyrics is something that I easily adapted to. I was able to fix my writing within and really understand it and let it be an extension of my normal conversation styles. The poetry thing is cool, but I think that most people just can't write, so when someone can actually write, they get the label of 'poet', which may or may not apply.

When did you start writing?

When I first learned how to write, I would write poems and stories. I was eight years old when I started writing Rap lyrics or rather, copying other people and then throwing in my own stuff until I felt comfortable writing my whole thing. Once I got the hang of the style and delivery and all that, I just went crazy trying everything out. Sitting in school, bored by the teacher, I would just start writing lyrics. Then I found out that I like to multitask. While I am supposed to be learning or doing something, I am also writing lyrics.

Do you like the West Coast or are you really an East Coast guy?

I am an East Coast kid at heart. The West Coast feels like this strange kind of paradise and it seems like a trick. Like I feel like you are going to wake up in a hell somewhere or something. People are weird too. Their personality types are just different. I'm not used to their style of interaction. I have often thought of moving to the West Coast but it doesn't feel like home to me. Maybe for a year or two, that might be cool, to explore the West Coast, find my inner West Coast self and pat it's back with a whisper and a tear.

sagefrancis.net

2005 " A Healthy Distrust" (Epitaph)
2002 "Known Unsoldier, 'Sick of Waging War'" (Strange Famous)
2002 "Personal Journals" (Anticon)
2001"Sick of Waiting Tables" (Strange Famous)

From: Freiburg, Germany
Album: "Hell Sweet Hell" (Lifeforce)
Web: fearmythoughts.com
Star Wars Nerds Unite: They actually have a song called "Tie Fighting".

After starting as a hardcore/metalcore band, Fear My Thoughts has evolved into a well rounded metal band. Their music is more technical and more polished but still plenty heavy. Crunchy guitar riffs are accented by subtle keyboards. They combine death metal growls, black metal howls and clean vocals. Influences on their current CD include Darkane, Soilwork and Iron Maiden. It was produced by Jacob Hansen, who also helmed the critically praised Mercenery album "11 Dreams." They do lose some metal credibility by their favorite foods listed on the band's official site. Two say theirs is fruit and one says vegetables. Fruit is definitely not metal.

From: San Francisco, CA
Latest: "My Pappy Was a Pistol" (BYO)
Web: myspace.com/filthythievingbastards
Who knew: The legal term for a child born to unmarried parents is bastardy, but if those parents marry after it's birth, the term can be altered to 'special bastardy'

Think of these guys as Me First and the Gimme Gimmes doing originals instead of covers. And instead of power-punk think of alternative-folk. Actually, don't think of the Gimme Gimmes at all, even though FTB are sort of an alt-super group. Instead, think what textured and remarkable dynamics you'd be able to achieve if you were as talented as the Swingin' Utters and suddenly decided to trade in your Chucks and Strats for accordions and violins. "My Pappy Was a Pistol", the Bastards' latest offering showcases not only uniquely heartfelt ballads but also harkens back to a time and a sound most punkers seem to have sadly forgotten. Remarkably unforced and cohesive, the Bastards are some of the best stuff BYO has to offer; and we all know that's saying quite a bit.

From: San Francisco
The Latest: "Howl Mockery at the Cross" (Moribund)
Web: moribundcult.com
Isaiah 27:1: In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.

Another band to emerge from the Bay Area black metal scene (along with Xasthur, Draugar, Crebain, and the late Weakling), Leviathan formed in 1998 by a man known only as Wrest. Leviathan's music is chock-full of muddy production, low-key instrumentation, creepy soundscapes and atmospheres, and loads of inhuman shrieks. The band's catalog includes twelve demos, three compilations, five split releases (including ones with the aforementioned Crebain and Xasthur), two full-length studio albums, and a dead partridge in a pear tree.

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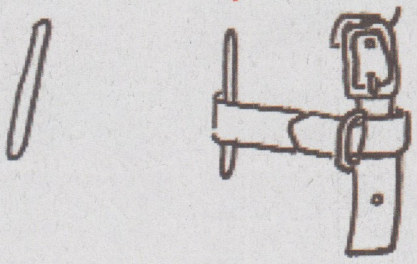

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"4 out of 5 stars for The Last Romance." – **Mojo**
"4 out of 5 stars for The Last Romance." – **Uncut**
"4 out of 5 stars for The Last Romance" – **TimeOut London**
"4 out of 5 stars. Raw, tender, emotional, charming, filthy." – **Manchester Music**
"Rock music rarely gets this raw." – **Rolling Stone**
"Brutal Candor" – **Q Magazine**

Hot off the heels of amazing pre-release publicity, the Scottish rock duo Arab Strap return with The Last Romance due out February 21, 2006! It's their most accomplished album and retains the provocatvie lyrics, yet with stunning melodic beauty.

TRANSDREAMER RECORDS
www.transdreamer.com

by Cosmo Lee

Wumpscut (or ":W:", as fans call him) is Rudy Ratzinger, a German electro-industrial artist who is one of the foremost names in the genre. Since 1991, Wumpscut has put out harsh, dark, classic albums such as "Bunkergate 7" and "Embryodead" as well as appeared on countless singles and compilations. Wumpscut trademarks include pounding percussion, distorted vocals, and an occasional pitchshift effect that makes :W: sound like a Satanic baby.

"Evoke", the new Wumpscut album, is somewhat of a departure from previous work. Stormers like "Churist Churist" and "Rush" will still pack dancefloors, but female vocals are prominent in many songs, and the production is cleaner and less harsh now. Even the artwork is sharp and bright, a change from the gloomy, skull-and-corpse imagery of previous releases.

:W: was asked about these changes.

"Evoke" is significantly different from your earlier work.
Is it?

I would say so. How have fans reacted?
"Evoke" is accepted the same way as all the other :W: albums were.

Well, the mood and sound on "Evoke" is lighter and cleaner than before. What caused these changes?
Hard to say. I don't think about what I am doing musically, maybe I was sick about distortion. Who knows, who knows.

Your equipment list for 2001's "Wreath of Barbs" included much hardware. Have your production techniques changed since then?
Yes, a lot (and you can be sure that this led to a cleaner sound on "Evoke" and "Bone Peeler" as well), no hardware anymore, and therefore no interferences, no noises (that you don't want to have).

Leather Strip was one of your early influences. Do you have influences now that might surprise your fans?
Yes, indeed, but it's better to keep them as a big secret. Ha!

Before you started producing, you were a DJ. Do you do any DJ work now?
No, not at all. The expectations you are confronted with (concerning style) are much too different from what I would play.

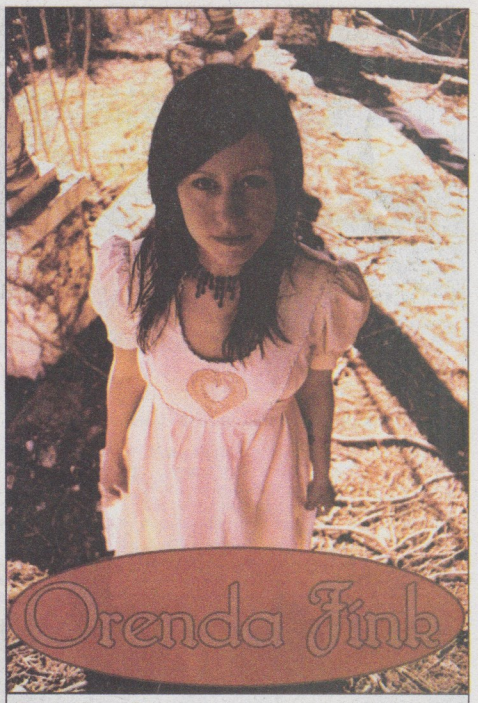
You are famous for your "no touring" policy. Might this ever change?
Nooo...

wumpscut.com

Wumpscut's discography is monster big. For a complete listing, check Wumpscut's website or wikipedia.org

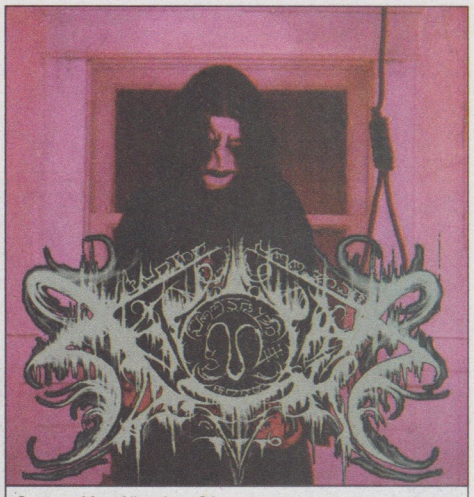
WUMPSCUT

...maybe I was sick about distortion?



From: Athens, GA
Album: "Invisible Ones" (Saddle Creek)
Web: saddle-creek.com
Stick a pin in it: Inspired by a trip to Haiti, Fink ditched love songs for Voodoo influenced chanting.

When you're happy, it's hard to write broken-hearted love songs. Fink's first solo album away from Azure Ray expresses her feelings about people that she feels are different than everyday society. The songs are lyrically layered and haunting at times. A lot of Fink's music was influenced by her trip to Haiti and exploration of Voodoo culture. Keeping to the breathy melancholic feel of Azure Ray, Fink sometimes explores a harder sound as well as a fuller sound when she is joined by chanting voices on some of the tracks. It may not soothe your soul on the same level as Azure Ray has in the past, but this album is full of spiritual energy.



Spawned in: Alhambra, CA
Tours: Rarely
Album: "To Violate the Oblivious" (Moribund)
Web: xasthur.mercurous.net/x.html
All it takes is one: Xasthur is Malefic and Malefic alone.

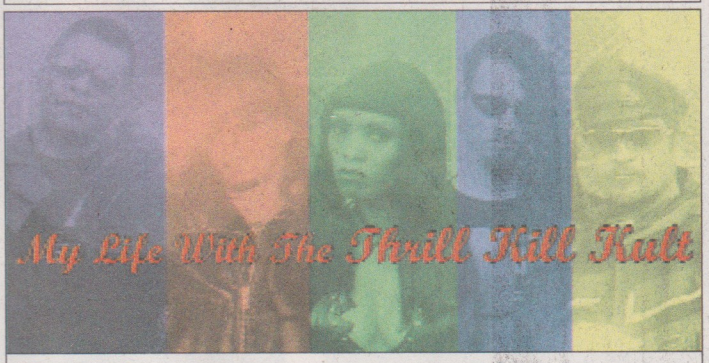
Many members have joined and quit Xasthur since the band's inception, however, in 1999 when the last member left, Malefic took over playing each instrument and handling all production duties. Xasthur is the outlet of most people's favorite qualities of black metal: gloomy melodies, inhuman shrieks of grief, and strange interludes, all played through raw, decaying production. Now there are four full-length albums and several split releases (including one with fellow one-man American black metal band Leviathan) in Xasthur's catalog. Note: Malefic will not be held responsible for any damages inflicted upon the listener's soul.

Location: NYC / Philadelphia
Album: "Clap Your Hands Say Yeah" (self-released)
Web: clapyourhandssayyeah.com
Network Television Debut: We saw these guys on Conan and swear to Jehovah, couldn't understand a fucking word this guy was saying. Good stuff though – made us feel like Splinter from the TMNT.

Do you remember MTV's *Buzz Bin*? If you do then you're probably over thirty years old or damn near getting close to it. If that fledgling network still had their precious *Buzz Bin* CYHSY would shit all over it with their independent rock and yellow country teeth. Seriously though, recording an album on your own and releasing it on your own (with the exception of shitsound getting their hands involved) to such critical acclaim and accolades is worthy of a shout out. Now clap your hands and say show me the motherfucking money!

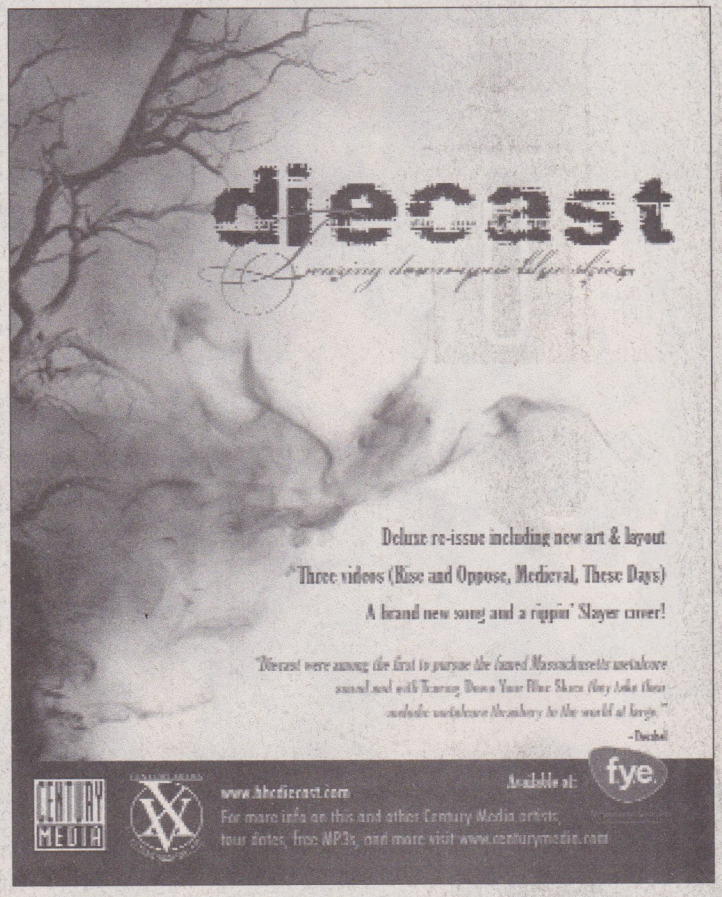
Location: Pennsylvania / New Jersey
Album: "Audible to Animals" (Textbook Music)
Web: marigoldgo.com
Botany: the petals of the Pot Marigold are completely edible, with a spicy taste

The ending of something good can be the beginning of something better. After the disbanding of This Day Forward in 2003, guitarist and vocalist Vadim Taver moved on to form Marigold. These New Englandites sound like a more rocking version of early Sunny Day Real Estate, which is fantastic. Their songs are rich in atmosphere and melody and Taver's wide vocal range is at least as impressive as Jeremy Enigk's. On their debut full-length, swirling melodies soothe and comfort before succumbing to some seriously rocking guitar riffs and hard-hitting choruses. Good times, good times.



From: Chicago
Latest music: "Gay, Black and Married" (Ryko)
Web: mylifewiththethrillkillkult.com
Secret Origins: Two Chicago club kids transformed their soundtrack to an art film project into this most influential of alternative industrial acts.

The living definition of 'sassy', MLWTTKK have been blazing trails in the alterna-electro-industrial-dance scene since the late 80's. With a club chic sound that sounds like it's covered in a designer drug coating, the music has flair and class and moves your ass. The newest music from this duo (with friends) sounds like they've been caught up in some disco madness. The synths are lighter and bouncier than in previous releases, and generally, the 'dance' angle is being more prominently displayed. Where in the past, there was a certain, dark, bottom floor of some NYC dance club vip lounge vibe, lately it's sounding much more Club54, sparkling and twirling in the colored lights. All Thrill Kill Kult music is above talented, and for long time fans, a new flavor on an old theme should rest upon the tongue like a quickly dissolving pill.



NODES OF RANVIER

by Chris Wharton

"An outlet of fun and expression" was coined as their mission statement when hardcore rockers Nodes of Ranvier formed in the fall of 2000. From these honest roots sprung an increasingly relevant and respected band who has been growing in the ranks of hardcore. Seeking to solely create music that the band enjoys playing, and also hoping that others dig it too, does much to recommend their hardworking mentality. Releasing an introductory split EP and two full-length albums (most recently, 2005's "The Years to Come") has only furthered their aspirations and the mileage on their van. Touring roughly six months a year alongside the likes of Bleeding Through, Norma Jean, Every Time I Die, MeWithoutYou, Bury Your Dead, and Living Sacrifice has brought the band to all four corners of the U.S. What do they do with all their free time on tour? The band's extensive road diary claims the usual suspects: van troubles and sleepless, Halo-filled nights, plus a few oddities that make for great conversation.

Words with Nodes of Ranvier vocalist Nick Murphy.

You're from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, also called the "gateway to the plains". What is the local scene like in your hometown?

Nick Murphy: It's pretty cool. Although I feel it is very different than any other scene I have experienced while touring the country. It's mostly because that type of music is kind of rare in the area, and kids that do like it, just come out to rock out and have a good time. So that's great. The downside to it being that the word "unity" really has nothing to do with the Sioux Falls scene and a lot of the older scenesters have a chip on their shoulder and in turn become very opinionated and unaccepting of music that they don't enjoy themselves, not to mention new kids coming into the scene. It makes absolutely no sense to me how one could let it slip their mind how great it was when they first discovered this music/lifestyle and how it changed their lives.

Your music has been described as a "musical, emotional, spiritual, and visual" representation of the band members. How has personal experience shaped the emotional and spiritual message?

I believe in order to convey real emotion into music you have to be as honest as possible, and write about things that bring forth those emotions in you, no matter what it may be. If affects you that deeply on an emotional level that you would choose to center an entire song around it, then the listener will recognize that when they hear it and feel it in your live show. So I write about life experiences that have affected me and that I know people can relate to. It is the ultimate payoff when someone comes up at a show and tells you how your song helped them through a tough time. There is nothing better.

How have the emotional and spiritual characteristics grown or changed your songwriting from album to album?

The new record was my first attempt at writing lyrics with Nodes. I had written before, but with other bands. I was playing bass prior to moving to vocals. So I can only comment on how the writing process was an overall emotional experience for me. There was so much I wanted to say and hopefully it comes through in a very positive way to the listener. I am looking forward to the writing process for new material.

You guys have really taken advantage of fan-oriented online tools with a clever road diary and online media. In what ways does this further your relationship with your fan base?

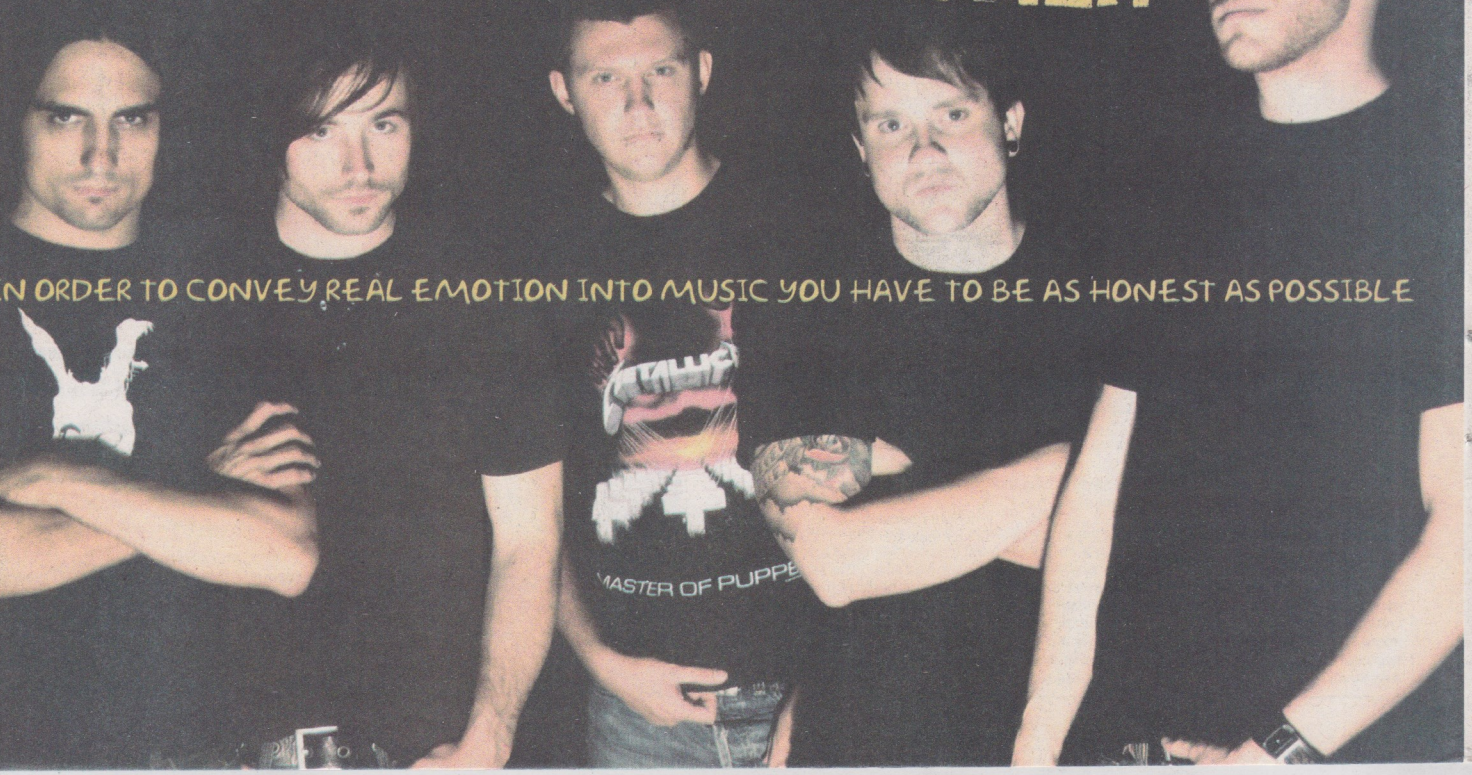
We always encourage our fans to talk to us in anyway they can. Either online or at the show, we love to make friends and be as close as we can with them. We have been so privileged to meet so many amazing people over the years that have helped us out and have just been super cool. Without those people, this band would never get out of South Dakota. We try our best to show them the same love they show us.

Leave the kids with some wisdom.

Don't ever let anyone tell you that your dreams are out of reach, if you want it bad enough, anything is possible. Much love and appreciation to our fans! We will see you on the road.

nodesofranvier.com

2005 "The Years to Come" (Facedown)
2003 "Nodes of Ranvier" (Facedown)
2002 "Lost Senses, More Innocence" (Facedown)



Band: Solea
From: It's a bi-coastal thing with the West Side represented most.
Album: "Self-titled" (Textbook)
Web: solea.org
Pedigree: Former members of Samiam, Texas Is The Reason, Knapsack, and Sensefield

One look at the bands the members of Solea used to be in and it's easy to assume what this sounds like. Melodic, angular, emo rock with smooth vocals. Ebb and flow post-punk with shades of balladic crooning. Mixtape music for lovesick youth. Driving tunes. Take a trip back to the mid-'90s when bands wore their hearts on their sleeves, and didn't need tossed-up hair and red circles around their eyes to do so. Definitely not fake.

From: Montreal, Quebec
Album: "The Lovvers EP" (Lovepump United)
Web: lovepumpunited.com
Silkscreen Folk: Half of AIDS Wolf is the acclaimed design team from Montreal, known as Seripop. (FYI – Chloe denied our request to be her friend on MySpace.)

AIDS Wolf is yet another startling good band from Montreal. Their chaotic brand of noise rock is made up of swelling guitar sounds, blistering distortion and thriving drum beats. Their debut album, "The Lovvers LP" consists of eight thrash heavy songs, all accompanied by vocalist Chloe Lum's garbled vocals and yelps. For fans of Hella, Black Dice, and the Boredoms.

Home: Champaign, Illinois
Album: "Fire, Blood, Water" (Minty Fresh)
Web: thelivingblue.com
Defenders of the Frail: These guys used to get into a lot of fights because the jocks in their town told them their shirts were too tight. No word on how skinny rock-and-rollers fared against college linebackers.

High energy garage rock, with a sound that ranges from the likes of early U2, especially in singer, Stephen Ucherek's pleading, low-key honesty in which he carries the presence of a more sedated, young Bono, to an organic form of early New Wave to Midwestern barroom twang. A loose, surf rock feel in the guitars from both Ucherek and fellow guitarist, Joe Prokop, seems the aural equivalent of crystal clear water breaking onto a tropical shore. Strong, emotive vocal melodies, juicy guitar work, and meaty rock and roll backbones.

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by Beth Fhaner

Pat Vaz has heard it all. As the vocalist/guitarist and founding member of Daydream Nation, he's used to hearing shit about his band's name, whose moniker is taken from the revered Sonic Youth album. But Vaz just thought the name was cool, and since he didn't sound anything like the aforementioned, he decided to keep it. The singer/songwriter also admits it turned out to be a blessing as critics initially had an obvious target to take aim at rather than detracting from the music itself.

Now those same critics are focusing intently on the indie band's kick-ass arena shoegazing sound.

After releasing a self-titled debut that was recorded in his hometown of Ottawa, Canada, Vaz hooked up with L.A.-based drummer Hunter Crowley, formerly of Brian Jonestown Massacre and The Warlocks, among other bands. In L.A. the duo, along with a few other notable musicians (Brent Rademaker, John Hennessey, Dave Koenig et al.), recorded Daydream Nation's second full-length album, "Bella Vendetta" which has garnered critical acclaim and comparisons to early Swervedriver, Oasis, The Jesus & Mary Chain, and Black Rebel Motorcycle Club.

With another release due out in early 2006, the frequent-flyer miles continue to add up for DN's frontman. Modern Fix recently chatted with Vaz from his home in Canada about British influences, L.A. versus Ottawa, and the future of Daydream Nation.

Watching MTV and reading Spin for a great new band is like waiting for the Titanic to arrive. It's never gonna happen!

How do you make the band work with you living in Ottawa and Hunter in L.A.?

Pat Vaz: I think the distance between Hunter and myself is actually a positive thing. Most bands spend way too much time around each other creatively and end up like we do anyhow, hookin' up with each other when its time to get down to work. It keeps everything fresh and it keeps friendships intact.

What was your overall vision for "Bella?"

I didn't really have any idea as to what it was going to be. I just wanted to see what would happen if I lost myself in a giant studio with the songs. And I relied solely on the moment to craft the songs on tape. It was incredibly exciting. My whole idea was to just let it flow naturally and to let the moment pull me along. I just let everybody play their hearts out and let them connect to the music in their own way. Then I would jump in and cross my ideas with theirs, and get the job done. It was fucking brilliant, pure creativity without any restraint or preconceived ideas. I just wanted it to be a huge rock record with a lot of soul and conviction.

Tell us about the exclusive track you have coming out on the London label AC30 Records.

Robin, the label boss, got in touch with me last year. He had heard about us through various circles in London. AC30 puts out a lot of great music and I have a lot of respect for what they're doing over there, so I'm glad we're finally doing something together. I really want to focus on the U.K this year. A lot of great music is going on over there and it's time we try to make some headway. Besides, every band I love is from that island! We're also putting, "A Passing Notion" on Northern Star Records' next compilation this year. They're out of the U.K as well, so it'll be cool to share some plastic with a host of killer bands.

Your third album is going to be somewhat different than the first two. How has Daydream Nation's sound evolved?

The new stuff sounds a lot grittier than the first two. I didn't really know where to go after, "Bella." That record is the record I had wanted to make for the last five years. I really had to hit the drawing board again and figure out where I was going to take the band. I've always had a love for early Stones "Beggars Banquet" era stuff. I love the sheer destructive force of that music, so I decided I wanted to strip away the multiple overdubs and set about writing songs that were carried by more swaggering grooves and meaner-sounding, more calculated riffs.

Do you think there might come a time in your career when you'll need to relocate to Los Angeles?

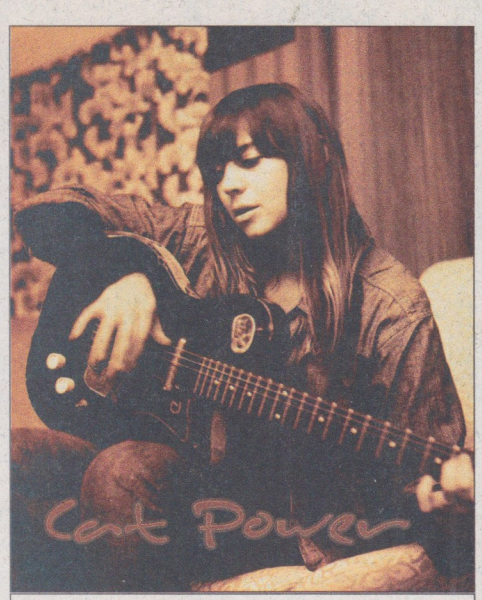
I think about that a lot. L.A. would be fun, but there are a whole host of problems, including work visas, etc. I think if I get to the point where I could afford to do it, I would spend a lot more time down there. But you know, I love Canada. It's a cool country, it's home obviously, and I like the fact that I live in a town that isn't consumed with the cool factor. Ottawa isn't full of haircuts and attitude, it's just another sleepy Canadian town. But who knows, the warm weather is certainly a nice perk, especially when I'm freezing my balls off in the winter! I don't think we're a major label type band, and people go to L.A for the big time. I really couldn't give a shit about trying to fit into that whole "trying to make it" bullshit that comes with Los Angeles. I make records. I'm too busy to go around kissing A&R ass.

Is there anything else you want to add?

Dig around for your music, there are loads of great bands out there. Watching MTV and reading Spin for a great new band is like waiting for the Titanic to arrive. It's never gonna happen!

daydreamnation.ca

2004 "Bella Vendetta" (Elephant Stone Records)
2003 "Daydream Nation" (Elephant Stone Records)



Location: New York
Album: "The Greatest" (Matador)
Web: matadorrecords.com
Irrelevant Fact: Not a fan of Charlie Chan.

Chan Marshall (pronounced Sean) is Cat Power, and she's coming at ya like a Honky Tonk Woman with a broken beer bottle in her hand. Her latest album "The Greatest" is an alt-country rockers wet dream. The album is full of melodies for them indie-cowpokes to fuck to. Backed by The Memphis Rhythm Band on this recording, Marshall digs deep into her pockets to bring out the honky in her tonky. Turn it down a notch and fondle your soul. Yeah baby. . .now take off your pants.

Hometown: San Francisco
Album: "God Bless the Electric Freak" (Alternative Tentacles)
Web: mandeadonmeturn.com
The band name: A reference to a part of the "death of Paul McCartney" hoax of 1969, during which it was believed that if you played a part of the Beatles' "White Album" backwards, you could hear the words, "Turn me on, dead man." Silly stoners.

A basement full of smoke and incense, a head full of acid, an eye on the sky watching for the Hale Bopp and no life aspirations beyond that next puff. Such are the criteria of one who loves stoner rock and these guys are definitely that. Lysergic, psycho-sludge jams with disembodied tunnel-hearing vocals courtesy of vocalist, Mykill Ziggy, replete with endless codas to lose sobriety to. They even pay homage to George Harrison with some stolen lyrics and a song title in his honor.

Rahim

by Jeremiah Griffey

In the aftermath of Q and Not U's decision to part ways, many indie rock critics dubbed Rahim heirs to the Dischord post-punk throne after the release of their goth-tinged four-song debut "Jungles". And, in truth, a lot of their categorization holds merit. Ryan McCoy's and Michael Friedrich's vocal interplay sounds an awful lot like Christopher Richards's and Harris Klahr's theatrics, even if Rahim's music sounds born out of Chicago math rock rather than D.C. post-punk.

The gothy guitars of "Jungles" revealed what was thought the essential difference between Rahim and Q and Not U: fun, or lack there of. Rahim seemed reluctant to have much, while their more established counterparts elected to create veritable dance parties.

But then Rahim went and created "Ideal Lives", a monkey wrench thrown both for and against the band's argument that they "don't think we sound like Q and Not U." A completely different animal than "Jungles", the significantly poppier "Ideal Lives" inexplicably has more in common with an album like Kill Me Tomorrow's "The Garbageman and the Prostitute" than you might want to admit. At any given point on any given song McCoy's bass, Friedrich's guitar or Phillip Sutton's drums take over for short blurts, almost as if they're communicating with each other instead of as one. At the same time the infectious vocals recall the catchiest moments of Q and Not U.

There's not much amiss on "Ideal Lives" in comparison to "Jungles" until the third track "Only Pure", where McCoy and Friedrich periodically burst over the top with Beatles-esque harmonies. The transformation progresses through "Desire" and "Forever Love". And it dawns on me. They're pulling from the 90 Day Men and the Beach Boys. Is that even possible?

"I know for a fact Ryan and Mike, even more so than The Beach Boys, are fairly obsessed with The Beatles, especially vocally," says Sutton from his home on Long Island. "Compared to the EP, they focus on vocal melodies - pretty vocal music with jagged guitar/bass/drums kind of stuff. "Ideal Lives" combines those two. Sometimes I listen to it and say, 'Wow. This is weird pop music.'"

It shouldn't come as a shock then, that Syd Butler (bassist for those kings of weird art punk, Les Savy Fav) released the record on his label, French Kiss. Rahim falls in line behind other label post-punk oddities like Sean Na Na, Ex Models, The Apes, The Hold Steady and Thunderbirds Are Now! to create one of the more diverse rosters in the underground.

"I don't think when someone says, 'Oh, they're a French Kiss band,' I would know what that sounds like," Sutton says. "I would hate to get pigeonholed. We sometimes get 'They sound like a Dischord band.' I don't think we sound like Q and Not U. I'm glad they have a wide variety of bands. It's a bunch of people doing different things. I enjoy that."

However, article after article calls Rahim "post-punk," the generic term for any punk band that's more creative and less angry than the Sex Pistols, too artsy to be called hardcore and not mid-years-Fugazi enough to be post-hardcore.

"Honestly, when I hear the term 'post-punk' the first band I think of is The Birthday Party," Sutton says. "I don't even know if that's accurate (laughs). I think I probably read that in the liner notes of the CD and was like, 'Oh yeah. That's a pretty cool term.' But I don't think we sound like Bloc Part - I'm sorry, The Birthday Party."

"You don't really sound like Bloc Party either," I laugh.

"No. Not Bloc Party, for that matter," he chuckles. "I dunno man. I'm perfectly satisfied, or even happy with being called that, because it's not 'emo' and it's not 'pop punk', two other terms I hate. We've also been called art rock. I guess I sorta know what that means, I think it's a compliment. I think it's accurate. When I think of post-punk bands I think of stuff that isn't as straightforward. What I think is post-punk employs a lot of negative space. With our music I think there's a lot of stuff going on, we're not playing over each other, but we're not exactly playing with each other. There's this space and jaggedness. I dunno."

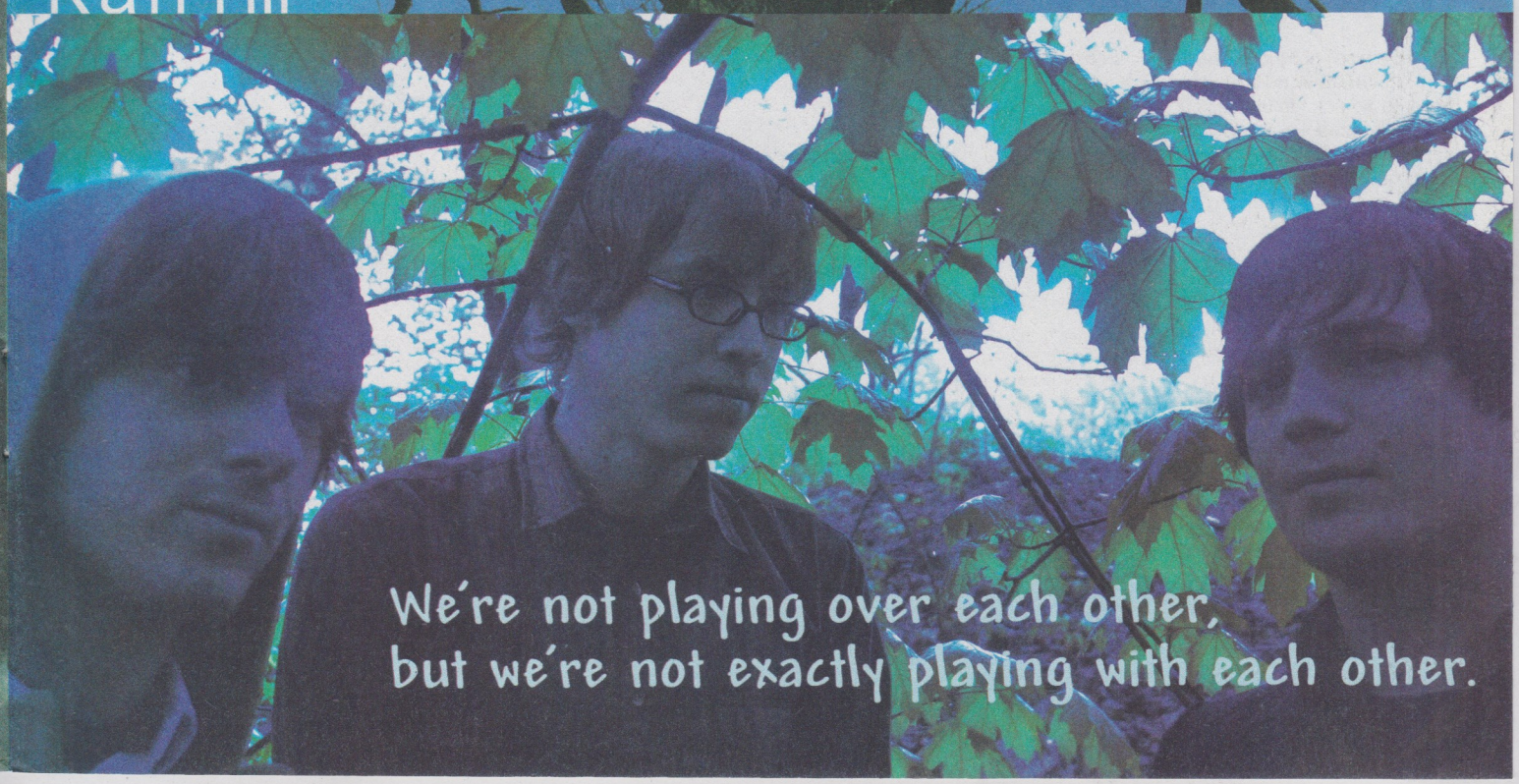
The band has already started writing songs for a second full length, in anticipation of a Herculean tour in the coming months. Sutton says it's not "'New Pornographers' poppy, but still more upbeat, but not totally. Again, this is one song so I can't say it's going to be something it's not."

They're hoping to follow in the footsteps of labelmates Thunderbirds Are Now!, who toured constantly throughout 2005 and subsequently garnered a sizable fan base.

"When we were talking to French Kiss they were like, 'You guys really have to tour your asses off,'" Sutton said. "That's one of the things they're really concerned about. With Les Savy Fav and their touring situation, Syd was just like, 'We did it. Anyone can do it. Get out there and do it. These records aren't going to sell themselves.'"

rahimrahim.org

2006 "Ideal Lives" (French Kiss)
2005 "Jungles" (French Kiss)



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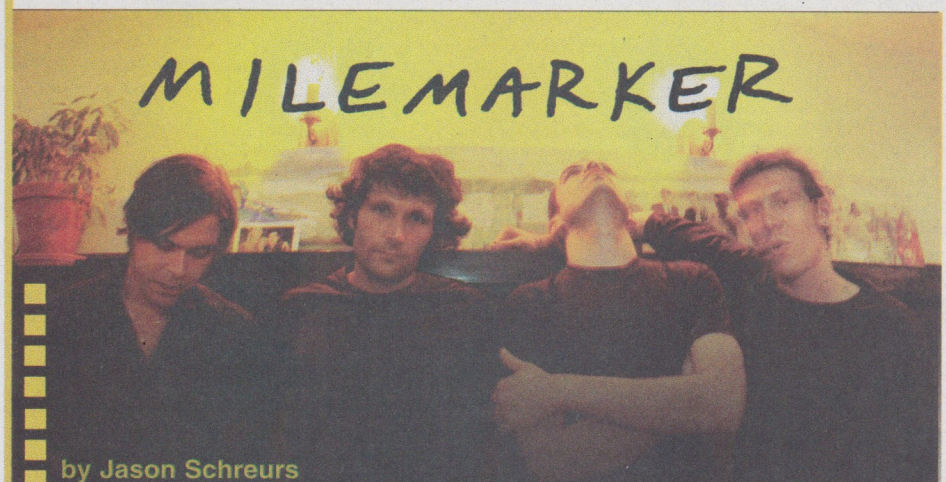


by Jason Schreurs

Chicago's Milemarker has been a revolving door of Windy City art rockers for almost a decade now, but one thing that has remained constant is the duo of Al Burian and Dave Laney. The two have persevered to create some of the most uncompromising indie rock around, never pandering to what's hip - in fact, if it's hip now, chances are Milemarker's already done it (and done it better) a few years prior. So with the release of their latest album, "Ominosity" it's interesting to note how the band has progressed and changed since their last album, a long three years ago. With original drummer Ben Davis back in the fold, the new album takes a darker and even more collaborative feel than their past body of work.

How do you and Al constantly push each other to progress?

Ben Davis: We were trying to go somewhere else with this record. We haven't released a record in a pretty long time and we didn't want to do it if we felt like it was half-assed, or there was one song that makes everyone cringe if they hear it, except for one member who says, 'I really love that song' and everyone else says it's terrible. But then we still and go and put it on the record. We didn't have to do that.

Does it take you guys a long time to write songs?

Usually it's fairly quick. We used to release everything good or terrible we ever did. We have complete records where I'm horrified if I listen to it sometimes. (laughs). It's kind of fun because it documents it and it's kind of cool, but it may not be the type of thing where I could go to a party and imagine hearing those songs. But our songs either work or they don't. Most of the time it happens pretty fast.

What was the hardest song to write on this new record?

Some of the stuff was written a long time ago, and the rest of the stuff was newer, probably about half and half. The first song on the new record had been around in some form for about seven years, so I contradict myself, but it was just this weird keyboard part that Al had and nobody could understand. It got scrapped pretty fast. It turned into something entirely different on this record, but I guess it took awhile for Al to express what he was trying to get out.

The song "Sun Out" almost has a Neurosis vibe to it. At least it's heavier than the average Milemarker song.

That's cool, that's cool. I like the Neurosis comparison. It just sort of happened that way, but that one probably took the most time to get where it was. That one had the most rearrangement over the longest period of time.

How would you sum up this new record?

"Anaesthetic" was a lot more synth-poppy, with some dominant, two-keyboard type songs. I think it started to pigeonhole us a bit. The idea with writing this record was getting away from the synth-pop side of things. It's funny, we just played a release show here a couple nights ago, and someone said, "They haven't played for awhile, I guess they are trying to cash in on the popularity of synth pop now." And I was like, "Did you hear the new record?" I don't understand how you can cash in when the average length of your songs is about seven minutes.

So is Ben Davis back in the band full-time now?

Ben flew in for the record, and we were working on the stuff long distance, and he came up for the weekend when we were in the studio. He's actually not playing live with us, but he had a pretty good hand in most of the synth stuff on the record. He did a good amount of singing on it as well.

So what will it be like playing live without him?

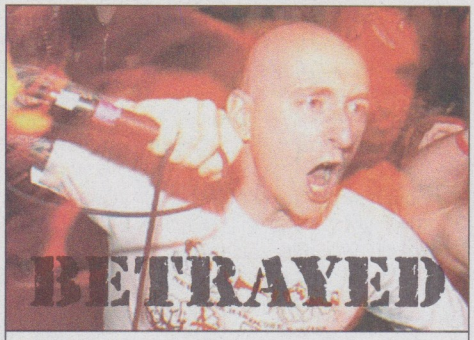
Live it will actually be quite different. We were trying to figure out how to do the record live, so we rearranged a lot of the songs around. But I still think it will be pulled off pretty close to how the record is, just not as grandiose.

Maybe you could get some guys from a Milemarker cover band to play a set of Milemarker songs with you?

I don't think we'll ever be in the position of being able to get the singer of our favorite band that covers us. "These guys are the best Milemarker cover band ever! Let's use the singer from their lineup..." Won't happen.

milemarker.org

2005 "Ominosity" (Eyeball)
2002 "Satanic Verses" EP (Jade Tree)
2001 "Anaesthetic" (Jade Tree)
2000 "Frigid Forms Sell" (Jade Tree/Lovitt)
1999 "Changing Caring Humans" (Stickfigure)
1998 "Future Isms" (Stickfigure)



From: Seattle
Album: "Addiction EP" (Bridge Nine)
Website: bridge9.com
Genre: Straight edge
Resume: Aram from Champion, Todd from Carry On, other dudes with Xs on their hands

With Seattle's Champion recently hanging up the Adidas, perhaps sober supergroup of sorts, Betrayed, might take the hardcore limelight. Or maybe this six song EP is all we'll get, but who's counting? Rocked-out hardcore with screamy vocals and lots of lyrics about staying true to the edge. Weeee!

Location: Chicago, IL
Album: "Born Again In The USA" (Drag City)
Web: dragcity.com
Resume: Tweedy and Kotche were in the acclaimed Wilco and O'Rouke was in Sonic Youth.

Like a mangled vagina kicking out some of the best country tinged rock music since Brooks & Dunn, Loose Fur (aka Jeff Tweedy, Glen Kotche and Jim O'Rourke) release their second offering, "Born Again In The USA" with amazing results. Find this if you wanna get found.

Spread between: New York and New Jersey
Release: "Alpha Males and Popular Girls" (Crucial Blast)
Web: soihadtoshoothim.com
Kick his ass: Each year, approximately 50,000 women are arrested for committing violence against men.

Art damaged, schizophrenic, string of genres mashed together type band. Embracing terms like, 'Blastpop' and 'Powerviolence', the band merges an endless stream of influences into a bludgeoning assault of hook laden attacks. For as much edge as So I Had To Shoot Him shows, it's smoothed out with frontwoman Contessa Von Bismarck's melodic howls and commanding vocal lines. Song structures are fractured like dreams and the trade off between the ugly and beautiful has never been so rewarding. A challenging listen for challenging times.

MIKE WATT*****

by Gordon Downs

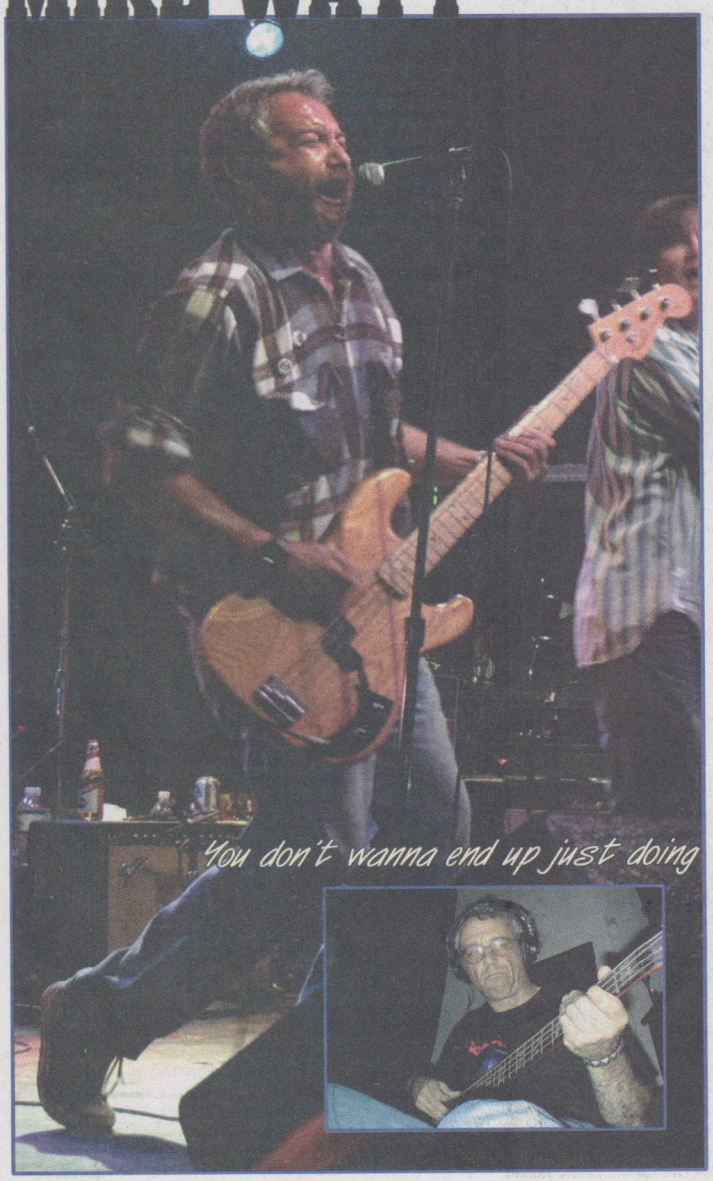
Perhaps the most credible forefather of punk rock still actively recording and performing music, Mike Watt is one of the most interesting and talented musicians to lay claim to the bass guitar. Dating back to his days with the seminal Southern California punk outfit the Minutemen, to his recent collaborations with some of the industry's finest musicians, his life is full of the stuff dreams are made of.

He most recently joined forces with his old friend and former band mate George Hurley along with guitarist Joe Baiza and poet/saxophonist Dan McGuire to form the Unknown Instructors. A strange mash-up of free jazz with a punk sensibility, the Unknown Instructors debut album, "The Way Things Work" was recently released by Smog Veil Records.

After he had just returned from one of his morning kayak runs at his home in San Pedro, Mike Watt speaks.

What time did you wake up today?
Mike Watt: Four thirty. Yeah I wake up early. I only stay up late for gigs.

So how did the Unknown Instructors come about?
Well it was a brainstorm idea from Dan McGuire, this poet from Toledo, Ohio, a guy I met years ago coming to my gigs. Things go on, you don't wanna end up just doing "I Love Lucy" reruns of yourself. What I've tried to do especially since fIREHOSE, is get in situations that are challenging. That way I can keep learning. And an improvised thing especially, you don't know what's going to happen. I hadn't played with Joe Baiza or George Hurley in awhile. Me and George did some Minutemen duet gigs awhile back.



You don't wanna end up just doing "I Love Lucy" reruns of yourself.

I was fortunate enough to catch one of those sets during the Matt Groening curated ATP Pacific at the Queen Mary a couple years back.
It was trippy to do them songs. I don't really listen to them a lot, because of sadness, heaviness. I just couldn't have another guy on guitar to replace D. Boon. Those gigs, they had a big effect on me. My next record's gonna be little songs. I hadn't heard those songs in awhile. The Minutemen have been in my mind, just as much as D. Boon, but like the band and the sound and songs. I was kind of afraid to go there, it gave me heavy feelings. Bit to hear it was kind of a neat idea, no filler. These little songs where you get in and get out. For my next project, I got a guitar, bass, drum trio called Mike Watt and The Missing Men, and I'm gonna do little songs. I'm gonna do a tour first and then we'll record. I wrote thirty seven little songs.

Do you know what label you'll be releasing this next album on?
I try to do things everywhere I can. Luckily because of the scene there's lots of opportunity. That's what kind of weirds me out when I hear people say these are the lame days. I mean, there's always gonna be some lameness, but in some ways it's much better than the old days because there's a lot more resources, people with little labels doing stuff. If you think back, Pat Boone sold more "Tutti Frutti's" than Little Richard, and that was fifty years ago. So shit is always gonna be co-opted. There's a herd tendency to get like sheep and stuff, and there are other tendencies that fight that.

When did you start rocking the flannel shirts?
I got it from John Fogerty. When I met D. Boon he was really into Credence, and I grew up in Navy housing so I didn't really know it was a farm shirt. I just thought it was John Fogerty's rock and roll kinda outfit. Marc Bolan had a boa, Fogerty had flannel. I didn't really know it was a rustic kind of thing, I just really dug them. Pendleton's are the grail man, those are my favorite flannels. All wool, it would bug D. Boon just to watch me put them on, the itchiness of it.

I've heard you say on record that you despise single pocket flannel shirts. Why?
(laughing) Well that's a personal thing. I also don't like the little buttons on the collar. I like [dual pockets] because I need places to put my shit. I also like flaps on the pockets so it don't fall out when you bend over. The thing you gotta watch out is drying them, because they get little. So I let them dry without a dryer. I like a little bit of white in them too. Because if you go into a club with a black light you light up and you look kinda like Madonna.

Speaking of Madonna, do you ever bust out the cover you did of "Burning Up" from the Ciccone Youth album?
Did it last tour with The Secondmen. Right after fIREHOSE, I put together a band that was mainly just for practice so I could stay in shape called The Madonnabees, and we interpreted a lot of her work.

What's happening with another one of your bands, The Real Oh My?
Oh, Nels Cline and Kevin Fitzgerald doing Stooges. Kevin got real busy with Circle Jerks and Nels with Wilco. So that was a problem. That was during a time when I had four or five Stooges [cover] bands. I still got a couple, I got one with two of the guys from Porno For Pyros. It's called Hellride, in fact we're playing in Orange County tomorrow.

Have you heard Tortoise and Will Oldham's cover of "It's Expected I'm Gone" yet?
Yeah, somebody played it for me. I liked it. I liked the way it was much different than the original. They did their own take on it. Not just a Top 40 knockoff, they actually bring something to it.

Does Mike Watt have a message for the children?
Gotta find the voice within, don't wanna be a rubber stamp. Don't wanna be a Xerox machine. Don't be a fake, let the freak flag fly.

hootpage.com

2005 "The Way Things Work" (Smog Veil)
2004 "The Secondman's Middle Stand" (Red Ink)
1997 "Contemplating the Engine Room" (Columbia)
1995 "Ball-Hog or Tugboat?" (Columbia)

Arab Strap

by Gordon Downs

Malcolm Middleton and Adrian Moffat have been recording and performing under the moniker of Arab Strap for about ten years. Creating some of the most unique and heartfelt indie-rock to have emerged from the Scotland music scene, their latest album, "The Last Romance" is their first studio recording since 2003's "Monday At The Hug Pint". Released last month on Transdreamer Records, "The Last Romance" is a straight ahead rock format with subtle undertones of angst that provides the perfect soundtrack for a disgruntled generation of jagged youth.

Middleton and Moffat, not long after they left on a tour of Europe, answer a few inquiries.

How does this album standout from the rest of Arab Strap's discography?
It's quicker, more immediate and much more fun than the previous ones. In a serious kind of way. It is a fabulous album and people are telling me it's the best.

What are some of the essential non musical items that are a must when on tour?
I just bought my first ipod, the new video one, and am completely in love with it. I've transferred the complete "Star Wars: Clone Wars" series onto it as well as, "Oldboy" and a Bruce Springsteen documentary. That plus plenty of comics and a few books. I'm reading American Psycho again and it's making me aggressive.

Arab Strap has been on quite a few tours, what's the strangest thing you can recall?
I'm usually too drunk to remember anything. I recall scrambling over the rooftops of the Columbia Hotel in London, picking up a bleeding hooligan whilst on acid, but it's all very vague.

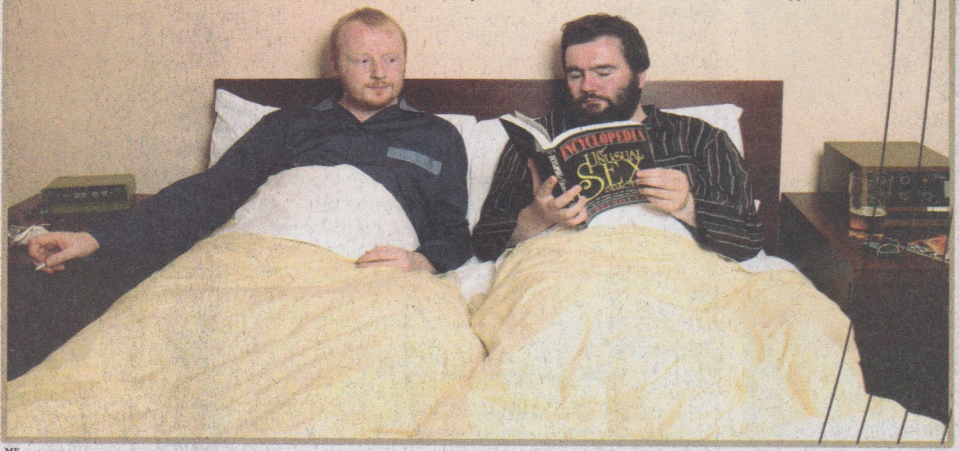
What can fans of Arab Strap expect in 2006?
Hopefully a lot of shows. We have a new band again and we're a lot louder and faster than we ever were. Plus, we will continue to deliver the best we can, both live and on CD. I think we have a new type of energy and hope we can give it to others in the world.

Does Arab Strap have a message for the children?
Don't trust Scotsmen with beards.

aabstrap.co.uk

2006 "The Last Romance" (Transdreamer)
2005 "The Cunted Circus [live]" (Arab Strap)
2003 "Monday At The Hug And Pint" (Chemikal Underground)
2001 "The Red Thread" (Matador)
2000 "Mad For Sadness [live]" (Jetset)
2000 "Elephant Shoe" (Jetset)
1998 "Philophobia" (Matador)
1997 "The Week Never Starts Round Here" (Chemikal Underground)

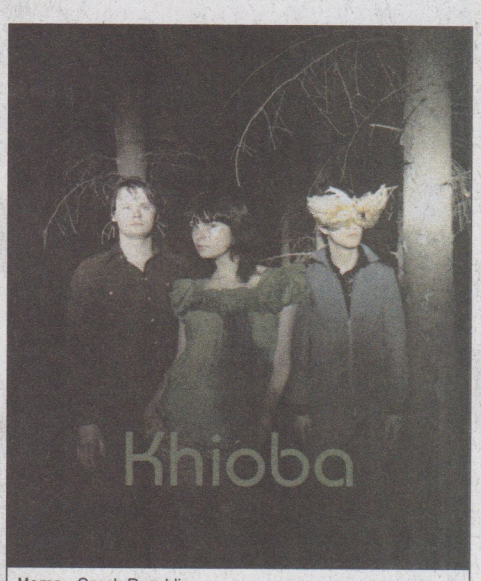
I'm reading American Psycho again and it's making me aggressive.



INQUISITION

From: Richmond, VA
Web: inquisitionrva.com
Reissued: "Revolution, I Think It's Called Inspiration" (A-F)
Bands with members from Inquisition: Strike Anywhere, Anna Beretta, River City High
Fact: The band name Strike Anywhere was taken from a song by Inquisition

A plethora of information can be divulged from Metallica's "Welcome Home (Sanitarium)". Sure, the band is a complete joke now, an empty, discarded shell of the giant cicada that was Metallica. While Inquisition may or may not have been the Metallica of political aware hardcore punk (genre names are so weak) they did set the foundation for many a band, most notably Strike Anywhere and slightly less Ann Beretta. Fuck, if you are a fan of either there ain't a reason out there not to at least buy this latest Inquisition reissue. The bands practically sound like they're from the same uterus, just maybe a few years apart. Inquisition played with their heart, evoking the true emotion and political backlash that tends to be hard to vibe off of other bands songs. It's pretty clear few bands play with this much heart, and while they will be missed as a band, it's nice to have music from ten years ago that shows no sign of aging.



Home: Czech Republic
Currently Out: "Nice Traps" (StreetBeat)
Web: mole.de/eng/Artists/khoiba.html
The band name: A word created by bassist Petr Samal, which raises questions about its intended pronunciation.

Soft, downbeat electronica with zephyr vocals from singer, Ema Brabcova make Khoiba's sound reminiscent of a Dali painting. Perhaps like Dali's interpretation of a nude female figure: surreal, but just real enough to hold interest. Drummer, Jan Maich's occasional use of acoustic drums and guitarist, Filip Misek's glassy acoustic guitar work bring a natural feel to the atmospheric pop, but otherwise, a transistor synth sound draws an impressionist landscape punctuated by Brabcova's breathy, slightly raspy, but very soothing quasi-pop melodies.

by James Wright

Welsh rockers Bullet For My Valentine have managed to do the unthinkable and bridged the gap between metal and screamo. Before your stomach turns from the thought of combing the two genres together, Bullet For My Valentine aren't your typical screamo bullshit or tougher than thou metalcore; they're a completely different beast. In an instant, Bullet For My Valentine seamlessly switch from the sonic pounding of Machine Head to the sugary sweet harmonies of Incubus without sounding contrived.

Comprised of childhood friends Matt Tuck (guitar/vocals), Michael Padget (guitar), Michael Thomas (drums) and Jason James (bass), the group originates from the same stomping ground as Lost Prophets and Funeral For A Friend. Growing up on a steady diet of Iron Maiden, Pantera and Guns' N' Roses, the band drew from a number of influences to make Bullet For My Valentine a musical chameleon.

Bassist Jason James talks about their debut full length and the band's current status.

You recently released the "Hand of Blood" EP here in the US and are now preparing to release your debut full length "The Poison". Can you give some insight into the creation of the album?

Jason James: Musically, we just get together and write riffs. Matt usually comes up with the main riff then brings it to us and then we all come together and finish the song. As for the lyrics, Matt will take it and put his lyrics to it. The songs are mostly evil love songs.

You worked with producer Colin Richardson (Machine Head, Cradle of Filth), what was it like working with him?

We chose Colin Richardson mainly because we have all grown up listening to his albums and they all kick ass. We considered him as one of the best metal producers in the business, so when we had the chance to record our first album, only the best would do. As for working with him, he is a really great guy. He's a perfectionist, so if something doesn't sound right, it just won't do. He thought all of our songs had really great structure so he didn't want to rearrange them, but he did have some really helpful points and additions to some riffs and some lyrics. He won't stop until he has perfected the best sound that he can. His catchphrase is "You're only as good as your last album."

"The Poison" was recently released in the UK and immediately shot to number one at rock radio and now you're headlining some big tours. Is it strange playing shows here in North America where you're still relatively unknown?

It is strange because over there in the UK, we're well known because we've worked so hard over the last two years touring. As for America, we've only just started touring there so it's just like starting out again. We've got to work even harder and tour as much as we can and hopefully things will go as well as they have over here.

What was the biggest culture shock for you the first time you set foot on American soil?

I'd have to say the different audiences and climate. One minute we were in a lovely hot city playing in front of an audience that knew us and the next, after a 19 hour drive, we were in a city that was freezing cold and playing in front of 10 people that didn't know us at all.

Your sound incorporates much more metal than most bands that come from the same scene. What are some of your favorite metal records of all-time?

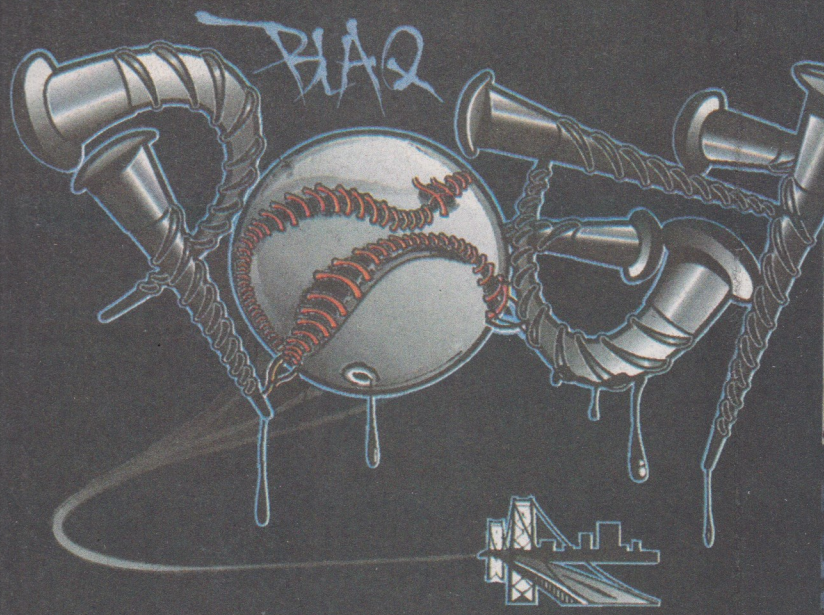
We all were full on into our metal and still are. I'd have to say, Iron Maiden "Somewhere In Time", Pantera "Vulgar Display of Power", Machine Head "Burn My Eyes", Metallica "Ride The Lightening" and Stuck Mojo "Pig Walk".

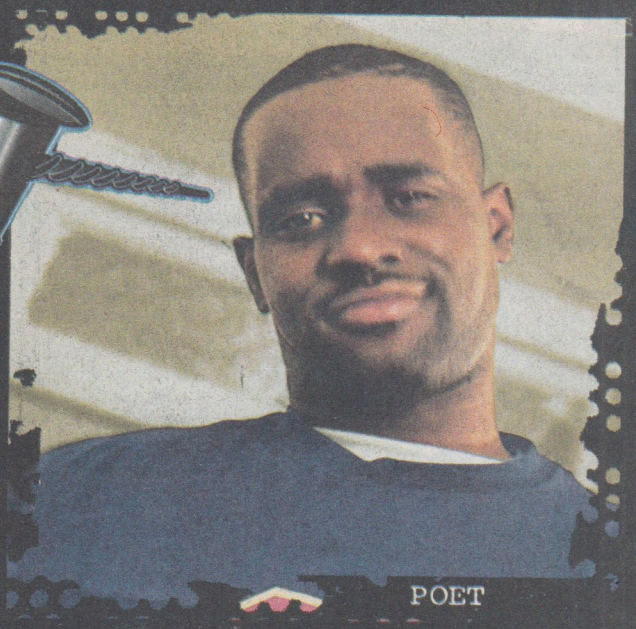
What separates Bullet For My Valentine from the sea of bands that fuse metal, hardcore and melody?

We believe that we are bringing the riff back. It's hard hitting metal with classic riffs and hooks, but still keeping an audience friendly melody. We have a little bit of everything in there. One minute we're tugging at your heart strings and the next we are smashing you in the face with brutal metal.

bulletformyvalentine1.com

2006 "The Poison" (Trustkill)
2005 "Hand of Blood" (Trustkill)





by Robbie Ettelson

Despite having maintained his position as one of hip-hop's most enduring tough guys for the last twenty years, Blaq Poet refuses to be stuck in the past. As he proclaims on "Bang This" (the opening track on his latest album): "My mindstate is '88. but my style is '09... I'm an OG, but I'm gettin' that new money!".

Having survived through the Bridge wars, a stint on Tuff City in the early nineties as part of PHD and two albums as a member of Screwball, Poet is sounding hungrier than ever and taking even less shit than usual. Having spent the last couple of years building a heavy street buzz thanks to a strong selection of DJ Premier-assisted mixtape bangers and a couple of dope singles, he's just released "Rewind: Deju Screw" (Screwball) to hold us over until his official solo album drops.

I gotta stay nice on the mic, I can't fall off. You're never gonna hear me sounding old on the mic.

Is "Deja Screw" a collection of all your mixtape stuff?

Blaq Poet: That's just a lot of lyrics, like my verses from "Y2K", my verses from "Loyalty" - verses from both those albums that I felt people didn't really hear. So I was like "Yo, I'm gonna do those shits over again over some hot beats", because I felt people didn't hear that shit the way I wanted them to hear it.

Have you got any features on the new album?

I got my man Teflon on there, got my man Big Shug, I got my man J-Rock - that's my little protege from the hood - that's my little artist. I got my cousin KL on there, Versatile - that's a female. She's the first lady of Screwball. The verse she gets off... she's gonna give a lotta bitches problems.

Is she on some Roxanne Shante shit?

She's like ten times Roxanne Shante. Shante wasn't a real lyricist, she was just a MC. She could rap but she wasn't versatile as a lyricist.

Is the Year Round project with Premo still on track?

Yeah, the Year Round project is poppin'. I'm just waitin' for Premier, whenever he's finished doin' what he's doin' - a lotta things right now. As soon as he's finished we're gonna start to wrap-up my album. Blaq Poet - "The Best That Never Did It". If not, I'll be working on another motherfucking album by myself. I'll get a couple of beats from Premo or whatever. I'm working, man. I'm getting busy, it's time to take over. Screwball Records, that's what it is. That's my little label. Since the group is not together right now - the group is just me and my cousin, right now - I gotta honor my man by keeping his name in people's faces. Screwball Records - it's always gonna some kind of Screwball somethin'. Either the group, either the label, clothing line, it's gonna be somethin' all the time - Screwball.

And you're doing some stuff with some French producers for a different project as well?

Yeah, I'm doing something with 45 Scientific. I don't know if we're gonna go through with it because we might have some difficulties, but hopefully it all goes through.

That "Message From Poet" record you did last year was something different.

Yeah, that was me telling niggas "Get busy - battle!". Fuck all the bullshit, battle. I'm just tellin' niggas a little message. Just a little message from me to the industry.

So is the album with Preme gonna be on the "F.A.Y.B.A.N.", take no shorts tip, or are you gonna have a few message songs on there as well?

Oh, we're gonna have messages, but I'm not telling niggas "peace". I'm not on that peaceful shit.

It's not some Talib Kweli kinda stuff. [laughs]

Yeah, I'm a straight warrior - I don't give a fuck who's in the way - niggas are getting laid down. That's what "The Best That Never Did It" is about. Straight street. If I'm gonna preach, I'm gonna preach in a way that the little guys, the little niggas gonna understand and they gonna listen. I'm not gonna preach to them like "Don't do this, don't do that". I'm gonna let 'em know the good and I'm gonna let 'em know the bad, and y'all make y'all choice.

You've been putting out records since '86. Was "The Wopp Sensation" you're first record?

'86, '87 - "Beat You Down", yeah. "The Wopp Sensation", that was just some bullshit. That was the craze at the time, I ain't no dancer. That was my man Noel's shit. He was a club DJ so he knew that people in the club were doing The Wop, so he was like "Poet man, let's do it. A dance record". I'm like "A dance record? Get the fuck outta here!" You know what I'm sayin? I was like "Aight, fuck it, let's do the shit." Next thing you know, B-Fats comes out with "The Wop", [laughs] and he blows up with that. I'm glad I ain't blew up with that bullshit. The other side - that's the drama side - "Beat You Down", that's what it's all about.

["Beat You Down" was one of a series of songs Poet made attacking KRS-One in the late '80's, as he jumped-in to protect the name and reputation of Queensbridge, at a time when BDP were tearing shreds off MC Shan. "Takin' You Out" contained this hilarious reference to Ms. Melodie (KRS' morbidly obese wife at the time)" "I'll make you and break you, just like a puzzle/Melodie's a Gooney Goo Goo, she need a muzzle/she eat all the

chicken, the turkey and the hamburger - if you touch it, you'll get murdered! That's why you're skinny, puny and measly/she eat all the food and beat you up easily".]

I heard that Just-Ice didn't take too kindly to something you said on a record?
Oh nah, me and Just is mad cool now and shit, but it was the song "All Hell's Breakin' Loose".

You were talking about "Just-Ice will melt".
Yeah, I was just talkin' about a lotta different people on there, and I looked at Just-Ice as one of the best niggas at the time. So him, T La Rock, Kool Moe Dee, Melle Mel, LL, Rakim, Ultramagnetic - at the time, those were the dudes. So I was like if I'm gonna be the best, I've gotta try to get at everybody! I was fifteen, sixteen years old. I just wanted to battle everybody.

Is it true that Just came down to the Bridge looking for you?
I heard he came out there and shit, lookin' for me, and he bumped into MC Shan. Shan started punkin' out, talkin' about "I told Poet 'Don't do it!'" [I burst out laughing], but I ain't never seen him, I ain't never run into him. We never got it on like that, but Just-Ice, that's my man right now.

I noticed that you took the whole Bridge wars seriously, but nowadays a lotta dudes are coming out with these sorta records just to promote a new album and stuff. Do you feel like it's almost like wrestling?
Yeah, a lotta shit is just hype. A lotta motherfuckers is not serious, niggas do what they don't even really feel... it's not the same. Nobody wanna battle, like back then when I was doin' it. I wanted to battle these dudes, that way there'd be no question. Like Jay-Z and Nas - them niggas need to battle, instead of makin' up and all that shit. Battle! Don't battle on wax - I mean, you can battle on wax, that's cool to - but battle in front of the people! That's what's up. That's the shit I came up in. But I ain't battlin' no more, that battle shit is dead with me. Niggas already know what it is.

But KRS just used that whole situation to get himself publicity.
KRS was mad at Tyrone, and mad at Mr. Magic and Fly Ty because they shitted on his music. They didn't like what he had, and when he was trying to shop that shit to them and they ain't like it, and from there he just attacked Shan and Marley. He just attacked The Bridge and everything, tried to shit on our whole movement, and I ain't like that so I had to make my move.

So after that period you formed PHD with Hot Day?
Yeah, I was down with my nigga Hot Day right after that. Me and Noel went our ways, and I met up with my man DJ Hot Day. Me and Hot Day was cool all the time in school and everything. He was like the next Marley Marl comin' up in Queensbridge, making his mixtapes and all that shit, so I was like "Aight, it's gonna be Poet and Hot Day - PHD". We did "I'm Flippin'", we dropped an ill album on Tuff City back in '91 . We were the first dudes showing guns in the video, and shootin' shit up in the videos before everybody was doin' all of that. We were the first ones showing the real shit on screen.

Even on the album, on the back you've got guns out.
Yeah, things were definitely goin' down. We were showing the good side and the bad side of the game. When niggas start flippin', you get that money, and the end result is you get nowhere.

Is Hot Day still making tapes?
I talked to Hot Day the other day on the phone. He's running around, doin' his DJ gig. He's a big DJ right now, a lotta people hired him to do their parties and stuff.

[The PHD album is also notable for featuring Cormega's first appearance on record, while Havoc from Mobb Deep also made an early guest shot on a PHD posse cut called "Set It". In the years that followed, both of them would have a significant presence in the Queensbridge rap movement, while the other MCs from that song (Hostyle, Solo and KL) also made a name for themselves when they formed Queens supergroup Screwball with Poet.]

In the PHD days, you had songs like "Set It" where you featured Kamakazee and Hostyle, was that just guys from around your area - before Screwball was a group?
Yeah, back then it wasn't no group yet. Screwball had got killed but I didn't make the group up yet.

So you named the group after your friend?
Screwball is...that's my man Louie Lou - Louis Chandler. That was his nickname, my man was tight. He got killed and I just made up the group in honor of his name.

Didn't Tommy Boy hold up the album because of the "Who Shot Rudy" record?
Yeah, they held-up the album. Coulda dropped that shit and went platinum if they woulda dropped it at the right time, when we had all that free publicity off the "Who Shot Rudy?" shit. We was all on the news, in the newspapers and all of that, but they don't roll with it 'cause they were scared of Time-Warner, and Rudy Guilliani at the time had ties with Time-Warner, who were the distributor for Tommy Boy, so they slowed down with dropping that.

What happened with that "On The Real" song with Nas?
That was some shit that Marley did with KL and Solo - Kamakazee. That's the other two parts of Screwball. Kamakazee and Screwball are the same shit, it's just two of 'em. With that "On The Real" shit, Marley had the DAT at his crib and Nas came up there one day and laid down shit first, to the beat. Then KL and Solo went up there and Marley was like "Yo, I got some shit with Nas. Y'all cool with Nas, right?" "Oh yeah, yeah. Nas is our man." They jumped on the track, then Marley played it and motherfuckers was loving it. So when it was time to put the shit out, Nas was acting funny like he didn't wanna put it out*, so we was like "Fuck it. He don't wanna get on it, he don't gotta get on it." We grabbed up Cormega and Havoc from Mobb Deep, got them niggas to get on it. They flipped it up - Nas is off of it and Havoc and Cormega's on it.

[A couple of years ago, Nas released "On The Real 2004" as a solo track as part of the Illmatic 10th Anniversary reissue, featuring his original verse and two new ones.]*

While many hip-hop fans consider that KRS-One got the upper-hand in the Bronx Vs Queensbridge battle, these days most street-level rap fanatics would rather pick up a Blaq Poet record instead of the latest Kris Parker release. This twist of irony hasn't been lost on Poet.

Back to the Bridge wars, KRS obviously had a lot of publicity from that but these days he's lost a lot of fans.
Yeah, 'cause he started up with Nelly for nothing, and it just looked weak. I'm not tryin' to be no old nigga on the mic, talkin' 'bout I used to do this or I used to do that, or how it was in the 80's and all that - fuck that shit! It's all about now. I ain't gonna stay stuck in the past man. Gotta be now.

You want to compete with what's out now.
I ain't even try to compete with what's going on now - I just do me. I don't say "Yo, I gotta do a record for the radio" or "I gotta do a record for the clubs"...nah. I pick my beats and I do my thing.

So we're not gonna be hearing Lil' Jon on your album!
Shit, me and Lil' Jon could do somethin' gangster, but it ain't gonna be what y'all used to from Lil' Jon. I'mma bring him into my world. I'd have him whylin' [chuckles], but I can't rap on no crunk beat! But I can have him screaming on some "boom-bap" beats - we can always adapt, man.

Because a lot of labels tell people "You've gotta do a Dirty South record", but you've got to it on your terms.
I'll do a Dirty South record, but you can't sit back and say "I'm gonna do a Dirty South record", you've just gotta do it. Whatever category it falls in, it falls in. I gotta stay nice on the mic, I can't fall off. You're never gonna hear me sounding old on the mic. My age and my body might get old, but the skills are gonna stay sharp. I think I'm better now than I ever was. I think I sucked back in the days! Now? Nobody can fuck with me.

yearroundrecords.com

2005 Blaq Poet "We Gon' Ill"/"Poet's Comin'" 12" (Beatdown)
2002 Blaq Poet "Poet Is Here"/"Message From Poet" 12" (Year Round)
2001 Screwball "Loyalty" LP (Landspeed)
2000 Screwball "Y2K" LP (Tommy Boy)
1999 Screwball "F.A.Y.B.A.N."/"Seen It All" 12" (Tommy Boy)
1999 Screwball "Who Shot Rudy?" 12" (Hydra)
1997 Screwball "Screwed Up" 12" (Screwball)
1991 PHD "Without Warning" LP (Tuff City)
1991 PHD "I'm Flippin'" 12" (Tuff City)
1988 The Fedz "Takin' You Out" 12" (11A)
1987 Rockwell Noel & MC Poet "Beat You Down" 12" (11A)

by Gordon Downs

Bay Area party rockers Numbers are one of the most intriguing bands making music today. Their combination of drums, Moog action keyboards and edgy guitars make this trio stand out against many of the standard three piece combos flying below the radar of mainstream America. Drummer and vocalist Indra Dunis spoke about their latest release, "We're Animals" and what it was like to transition from the San Francisco based Tigerbat6 label to Pacific Northwest heavyweight Kill Rock Stars.

Numbers had been long associated with the Tigerbeat6 label, though your latest album is released through Kill Rock Stars. Was it difficult switching labels? Did you have to shop this record around at all? What's the story behind the move?

Indra Dunis: It was a pretty natural progression for us. Tigerbeat helped us get our start, but after our 2nd full length, "In My Mind All The Time" came out, we realized we needed a label that was a little bigger. It was a friendly transition. Kill Rock Stars expressed interest in us, and we were thrilled. I've been a fan of them since I started listening to Bikini Kill when I was a teenager. They've put out a lot of great music over the years so naturally we were very excited to work with them. But at the same time Polyvinyl said they wanted to put out our new record, and they're a cool label too, so we decided to do the CD with Kill Rock Stars, and have Polyvinyl release the vinyl version.

The latest album, "We're Animals" has the vibe of a concept record. Is there a grand concept behind the album or is it just a collection of songs?

It is pretty trippy compared to our earlier stuff. We intentionally wrote songs that were different, but I don't think we really had a concept we were trying to follow. I think we needed a change so we got together to try and write something new sounding. We slowed down a bit, and added some depth. Dave played more chords and Eric got a second keyboard which filled out our sound a bit. I decided to write some vocal melodies, and try singing more than yelling. Also, I wanted to play more rock beats rather than dance/disco style drums. We wanted to see what other sounds we could come up with, but keeping the same instruments and line up. The first song we wrote for the record was "Solid Pleasure" and we all felt excited and inspired to keep going in that direction.

When Numbers isn't touring, what do you guys do in the bay area? Day jobs?

I am a freelance photographer and play in another band called Dynasty. Dave is a motorcycle mechanic and races vintage bikes, and Eric has his own business doing film and video transfers and he makes films. Also Eric plays old timey country music.

The band has toured the states a few times now - what's the weirdest, strangest occurrence that has happened to the band while on the road or in SF for that matter?

...but he stayed on the rest of the tour, and he still has the bullet in his leg!

Well, there's been a few weird things that have happened, but probably the scariest was when our tour manager got shot in South Carolina. We were on the Tigerbeat6 tour in 2002 with Cex and Stars as Eyes, and after we played our show this kid offered to put us all up at his dad's fancy waterfront mansion. When we got there we all split up to explore. Some of us went down to the dock to checkout his sailboat, and when we came back inside to the kitchen all of a sudden there was a loud BANG! It came from upstairs and I thought some large piece of furniture had been knocked over or something. I ran upstairs, and saw our tour manager walking slowly down the hall with his pants around his ankles. He had blood running down his leg and was in shock. I looked beyond him and saw a hole in the glass door behind him that led to a balcony. We had just seen on the news that there was a sniper on the loose in that area, so my first thought was he had been shot by this sniper! But as it turned out one of the other members of our tour had found a room full of guns and accidentally shot off a rifle he thought wasn't loaded. The bullet went through the wall ricocheted off the balcony door in the hallway, and hit our manager's leg! He had to use a cane for a couple weeks, but he stayed on the rest of the tour, and he still has the bullet in his leg!

"We're Animals" just came out a few months ago, but I have to ask if you've been writing any new music since its release?

We wrote one new song and recorded it in our practice space. It's called "Fly On The Window" and it's coming out on a comp for the SF label Folding Cassettes.

Does Numbers have a message for the children?

Do what you love.

numbersmusic.com

2005 "We're Animals" (Kill Rock Stars/Polyvinyl)
2004 "In My Mind All The Time" (Tigerbeat6)
2003 "Death" (Tigerbeat6)
2002 "Ee-Uh!" (Troubleman Unlimited)
2002 "Life" (Tigerbea6)

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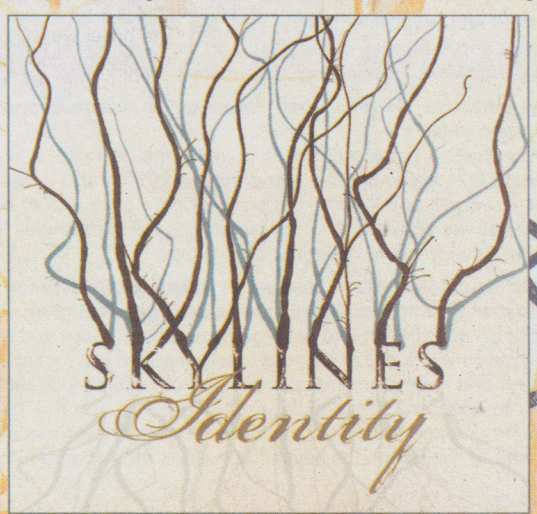

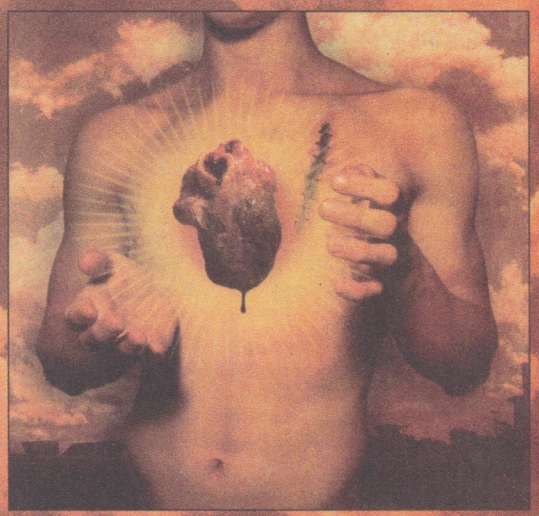

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ON BROKEN WINGS

by Matt Walker

On Broken Wings is one of Boston's heaviest and most promising exports of the past few years. If there is any dispute over this, their latest release, "It's All a Long Goodbye" presents a good argument for their case. It is an excellent example of the band at its best; brutal vocals, awesome metal riffs and a pummeling percussion section that all comes together for some serious metalcore action.

Singer Jonathan Blake talks about the ups and downs of the past year and their latest album.

You guys got to play some shows around Australia recently. How did it go?

Jonathan Blake: It went really well. Kids in Australia go off and were all real into us and knew the songs. It wasn't better than over here, and even if it was I wouldn't admit to it. But kids don't see us every month over there so I think everyone made sure they came out and went off cause it not just like they can catch the next month's tour or something.

Impressions of the Australian music scene?

Same as here pretty much. Everything looked like it had its own niche. I talked to tons of kids and hung out and rode in the van with Carpathian, the band we toured with there. Some of them liked the metal stuff, a lot of kids were more into the old school shit. It wasn't that much different than here really. Kids don't mosh as hard, but I mean, they're Australian. (Laughs)

The band was denied entry into Canada earlier this year, were you trying to smuggle in some anti-Canadian paraphernalia?

Ummm, no. What the hell is anti-Canadian paraphernalia? Who even cares about Canada enough to dislike it? We didn't have any working papers and we had my brother with us who isn't allowed in Canada and decided not to mention that to us til it came up. (laughs) Then they started checking me and Kevin (Garvin - drums). There was just no way we were getting in. We went back a few months later and had work permits and visas and everything. The border wanted so badly to deny us again. They called me and Kev into the back like kids at the principals office. They had a list of every bad thing I ever did in my life. Like shit that got dropped, shit that happened before I was 18. I felt like they shouldn't have even been able to know half that crap. They told me we weren't getting in. But then made us sit there for another five hours (not exaggerating) and then finally let us in at like 8 am. It was retarded. It's never been as hard for me to go anywhere as it is to go to Canada.

You were hit with some bogus charges this summer. Have you gotten all of that straightened out? It looked like Eulogy was very supportive throughout the ordeal.

It's not even so much that they were bogus charges, I just feel like they were being a little over zealous with the whole thing. The DA and prosecutor and whoever else hated me. I got so many 'tsk tsk' looks and remarks. They wanted to give me 1-5 (years). They were just being real malicious with the whole thing. Eulogy made these shirts and my friends from home set up a paypal account or something, which I hate when bands do, but my friends didn't care. They just wanted to help me out and raise money so I could get a real lawyer. They did what they had to help me and it really did help. I got a good ass lawyer from the Attorney Generals office. I had a hook up there too, but either way, I got a good lawyer and the kid who got hurt in the ruckus came to my defense, so he was awesome. They dropped it to time served and I had to pay a ton of fines. Its all straight now. Thanks to anyone who bought a shirt or gave money or cared. (Laughs)

The band has faced some serious obstacles in the past few months, from you blowing out your knee to the legal issues, but the album that has gotten some great reviews. How do you view the past few months for the band?

Good. My knee is fucked. I need surgery. All that court shit happened. Whatever. We got to go some places and meet people I never would have gotten to if it wasn't for the band. We were well accepted in Australia, Germany, Canada and the US. Kids seem to be into us and as long as I can do something like drive across the world with my friends and meet new friends who are psyched to see the music we make, and kids keep coming out and we keep giving kids a reason to beat the shit out each other, then there's nothing wrong with that

The video for "Frozen Over" looks great. Impressions of making a music video?

The process of making a video is awesome. We shot it in a 10 below freezer that we could only stand for like 20 min at a time. It was nuts but it was still fun. It came out pretty good. I can't wait to do it again. I just wish we could do it for all our songs. It's hard to pick which one's my favorite or would make the best video.

What would you like to see in the future for On Broken Wings?

Everything that's happening now, but bigger. (Laughs) I love what's going on now. I want it to keep going and meet more and more people and have more fun crazy stories to tell when I'm old. I want to play more shows and have more kids hear us and have more kids turn up and be able to keep doing this til its dead. I'm gonna run this band into the ground and then hang out and tour with all the new friends I made and go see all the bands I'm psyched on when they come to Boston.

onbrokenwingsma.com

2005 "It's All a Long Goodbye" (Eulogy)
2003 "Some of Us May Never See the World" (Eulogy)
2002 "Number One Beautiful" (Self-Released)

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Metal Hearts

by Jason Schreurs

Call me a skeptic, but I don't usually put a lot of faith in the ability to enjoy two-piece indie rock bands with teenagers in them. Sorry, it's just that bands at the ripe age of 18 and 19 who play melancholy tunes just aren't normally that good. Until Baltimore duo Metal Hearts came along and everything changed. Featuring Flora Wolpert-Checknoff and Anar Badalov, who handle a myriad of different instruments on their latest album, "Socialize" the band has injected hope into the pre-adult indie rock set by simplifying simplicity. The sparse, stripped-down tunes on their debut for Seattle indie label Suicide Squeeze (Minus the Bear, Hella, Crystal Skulls) maximize the duo's genuine sounding vocals and uncannily skilled instrumental work. And the best thing about being teenaged musicians is looking forward to the many years to come. Consider this: If Metal Hearts are making albums like "Socialize" in their late teens, just how good will they be when they are in their late twenties after they've lived some life?

The duo thankfully had an abundance of answers.

One of the things most like about "Socialize" is the sparseness of the songs with the airy holes in the songs and the room to breathe. Was this a conscious decision or just the way the songs came out?

Flora Wolpert-Checknoff: I never considered the sparseness of the album while we were recording it, and even now as many people point it out to us, I still don't hear it. I do notice a very different sound in comparison with other artists' recordings, but I've never thought of that difference as minimalism. I think it's very much what we hear in our minds when writing and so it's second nature, rather than intentionally odd. In retrospect though, not only did we not have the kind of skills to refine and embellish the sound as much, but I feel in some cases the more we fill in a song, the more generic sounding it will become.

Anar Badalov: The bare sound definitely developed unconsciously. I didn't even hear it until people started throwing out that description, "airy and spacey". I think it had to do with us adjusting to more professional recording equipment, and not really taking the time to try to add layers upon layers because we were satisfied with the way the melodies of the guitars and vocals sounded on their own.

Do you two play all of the instruments on the CD? Are you formally trained or did you learn yourselves? How long have you been playing music?

Anar: Flora and I created almost all of the electronic drum beats on simple drum machine programs like Hammerhead, Hotstepper, other illegally downloaded German drum sequencing things. Sam Leiber, our live drummer and recording engineer, added some electronic drumming to a couple songs. He also added guitar to one song. Aside from that, Flora and I do play all the instruments on the record. We both do a little keyboard, although there's much more of it live - mostly sounds and effects. It's basically two guitars, a keyboard sometimes, our vocals, and Flora on sax a couple times. I wasn't formally taught, and almost a couple months after I got my first guitar, the cheap Squire I still play, I started writing songs. I started around 14, mostly writing depressing Greg Dulli (Afghan

Whigs) inspired drone. Together, we started playing in 2004. Since then we've self-released a 20-track debut and now "Socialize".

Flora: On the album, our friend Greg Bortnichak plays cello on two songs. He'll be playing on our next album as well. I grew up studying jazz on alto sax from when I was seven, so I've been playing since then. I got an acoustic guitar in 2003 and couldn't really play anything besides my own ideas. In 2004 I got an electric guitar for Chanukah and soon after met with Anar to use it to my best advantage. Although I love writing with it, I still don't really know what's going on with it or how to play it, and I don't think I'll ever really own it. Sax is my real love, however much I ignore it.

Why was Suicide Squeeze a good fit for you guys?

Flora: It becomes more apparent as these first months pass by how fortunate we are to have been picked up by Suicide Squeeze. We sent our stuff out to a lot of labels and I don't think any of them would have been able to match with us so spittingly. Suicide Squeeze is completely genuine and open with us as their artists and as people. They're the perfect balance of business and personal involvement. They have a great roster with artists of different levels and styles.

Anar: They are so personable and they're in it for the music. They're artist-friendly, constantly supporting us in any way possible. Signing us and giving us an opportunity to get our music out is the best thing anyone's ever done for us. It's just that we're really young [18 and 19 years old], and it was difficult to find a label that would consider our potential and give us a chance to show everyone what we're made of and Suicide Squeeze is giving us that chance. Not to mention I really love Six Parts Seven and Headphones.

You use a lot of "dance beats" for rhythm on this record. Are you fans of dance music, and why did you decide to incorporate this into the CD?

Anar: I'm so happy that you noticed that. No one else ever brings it up. I'm actually an enormous Arab Strap fan, and that's where the inspiration for sparse, dancey electronic drums came up. I am a fan of dance music, but mostly the droning bare electronic kind.

What's your guys' relationship like? It must get pretty intense living together and creating music together. Tell me about the tense and/or passionate moments.

Anar: It used to be more intense, but I think we've started getting along better now. Most of the intensity comes down to shit that happens with our girlfriends. It always happens at the same time, so we come together and bitch. We write a lot though and it helps to live together. We feed off each other's ambition. It only gets tense when one of us is in a bad mood. I think we're both kind of volatile.

Flora and I created almost all of the electronic drum beats on simple drum machine programs like Hammerhead, Hotstepper, other illegally downloaded German drum sequencing things.

Flora: We're certainly not the most agreeable or appeasing types. It took us a few years to recognize bullshit as mere bullshit. There's always paranoia though, one of us is always convinced that the other is plotting some elaborate scheme against the other. But that will never change. Just as we feed off of each other's paranoia and insecurity, as Anar said, we feed off of each other's ambition. "How dare he write another song before me!" Just like that. We may, in fact, be becoming one person. Living together has intensified not only our similarities but also our songwriting, as will be shown by our next effort.

Who is the girl in "Disappeared"? Are most of your songs narratives or based on real-life situations?

Flora: "Disappeared" is embarrassingly about myself. It was during a very uncomfortable time while I was in Montreal. The song is just a fantasy I had of being removed instantly from the situation. It's not about death or anything. So that's an imagined story told in song to describe a feeling. I guess most of my songs are a lot like that.

Anar: Our songs are mostly based on real-life situations. Maybe it's a little different for both of us. I know "Gentleman's Spell" was a story about a particular situation that I was in during my first semester of college in Rhode Island. The same goes for most of the other songs that I wrote for the record. I like the idea of having stories told through songs. I hope the next record has more of that. It's intense reliving the situations.

When you guys were in high school I bet you never thought you'd be in a band together, playing shows with bigger indie rock bands, and with your own CDs out. Do you sometimes just marvel over how it all came to be?

It's interesting to note that you guys aren't satisfied with this album, even going so far as to say it "sucks" in your official bio. What about the record do you feel is limiting or lacking?

Flora: I think the album is great. I think a handful of songs could have been performed a lot better. We could have been more thorough in making sure all tracks were what they should be. Along with certain performances, I've been dissatisfied with a lot of the lyrics and I think the next album will have to make up for poorly written poetry. But, flaws and all, there are moments in "Socialize" that people will be able to hold close to their hearts and that's what matters.

Anar: I feel like as soon as we recorded this, better material started coming up with Sam drumming live. There are a few songs I wish we hadn't put on, but I'm still content with the album. It's always been that way, of course, because there are always so many new songs being written and ideas are constantly changing. I have so many ideas in my head it's frustrating, but I can feel an incredible album coming. If I could change one thing about the album I'd make it more expressive. I suppose it doesn't "suck" but it's just a start, and I want people to realize that. If someone doesn't love this album, I think they might love the next.

How will the next album be better and/or different than this one?

Anar: The next album will be a bit more full and recorded with more care, but it'll still sound like Metal Hearts, just a more developed version of us. It'll be more evolved with more complex time signatures, rhythms, melodies, lyrics, etc. On the rhythm section will be Sam and simplified electronic drums and sounds, much like we're using live now. It's just going to be more mature sounding in general. There's definitely no sophomore slump coming. We hope to have the next one out by January or February of 2007.

Flora: Having just recently written out the track list with Anar, what really stood out to me was the absolute intensity of each song, at least at a personal level. It was emotionally draining just reading the list to myself. With "Socialize", the songs we chose didn't have the same urgency. I think we're still figuring out how to express ourselves musically. We have all of these insane ideas all the time. As our musicianship and writing skills grow, so will our ability to unleash our insanity.

If you'd like listeners to get one message or emotion from your music...

Flora: I want listeners to be inspired while they're listening, either creatively or however they might need to be.

Anar: I want listeners to feel comfortable, and I want them to relate and feel relieved. I don't want to create surface music or background music, and I hope listeners get chills from it, at least some of the time.

metalheartsmusic.com
2005 "Socialize" (Suicide Squeeze)
2004 "Escapists" (Self-Released)

silver jews

Photo: Michael Schmelling

It's better to walk than to ride like that.

by Gordon Downs

Since the early nineties, David Berman has been churning out some of the most unique alt-country rock under the moniker of Silver Jews. With help from Stephen Malkmus and Bob Nastanovich, (both former members of nineties indie forefathers Pavement) the Silver Jews quickly became a hit amongst the underground and college radio set. Berman rarely, if ever, did many interviews to promote his albums, seemingly relying on word of mouth from fans and critics since he choose not to tour despite his many releases. Though with his latest album, "Tanglewood Numbers" Berman will finally be hitting the road this spring with a hodge podge of musicians backing him up.

In a rare interview, Berman spoke about his upcoming tour and the many perils of what it's like being the head Silver Jew.

When you started writing and recording as Silver Jews in the nineties, did you ever think your words and music would have such a profound effect on certain people's lives? Silver Jew fans seem to fall into a category similar to fans of the Grateful Dead, very dedicated.
No. I'm not too aware of this. Maybe when I play some shows. I've never really been to a place where everybody liked me. That's why I'm going to my own show!

Did you ever think that the Silver Jews would still be recording and releasing albums in 2006?
No. I didn't really believe I'd be alive in 2006. The number just keeps going higher. Next year it will be 2007.

Have you ever considered ending the band in previous years? And if so, why?
There was a time when I tried to give my guitars away in 2002. Nobody would take them. Or they just held them for me until I got a hold of myself again. It seems strange to me now that I could be that melodramatic.

What can you say about "Tanglewood Numbers" in regards to this album being perhaps the final Silver Jews recording? Is there any truth to that?
No. I don't think there is an end to the Silver Jews. When it is time for me to die, I will teach the secret knowledge of the band to my humanoid servant who will then assume co-leadership with the Bob humanoid and the Steve humanoid upon my death.

After years of being hounded by the press for interviews, why did you finally decide to do press for this album and not the others? What were your personal reasons for refusing to talk to journalists?
I didn't refuse to talk to journalists. I don't think anyone was trying to reach me who couldn't. Very few rock critics give a rat's ass about the Silver Jews.

Were drugs and drinking an important part of the creative process when it came time to writing songs and lyrics?
Drugs had something important to teach me when I was younger. In my thirties I just wanted to be hammered.

How the hell did you figure out you could smoke the gel of that damn patch?
This is sad but, the answer is "the internet".

Do you believe that all good things come in moderation, or is that bullshit?
What is good in excess? I don't know. Maybe laughing. But there must be a medical condition where you can't stop laughing and inside you want to die. It might be true.

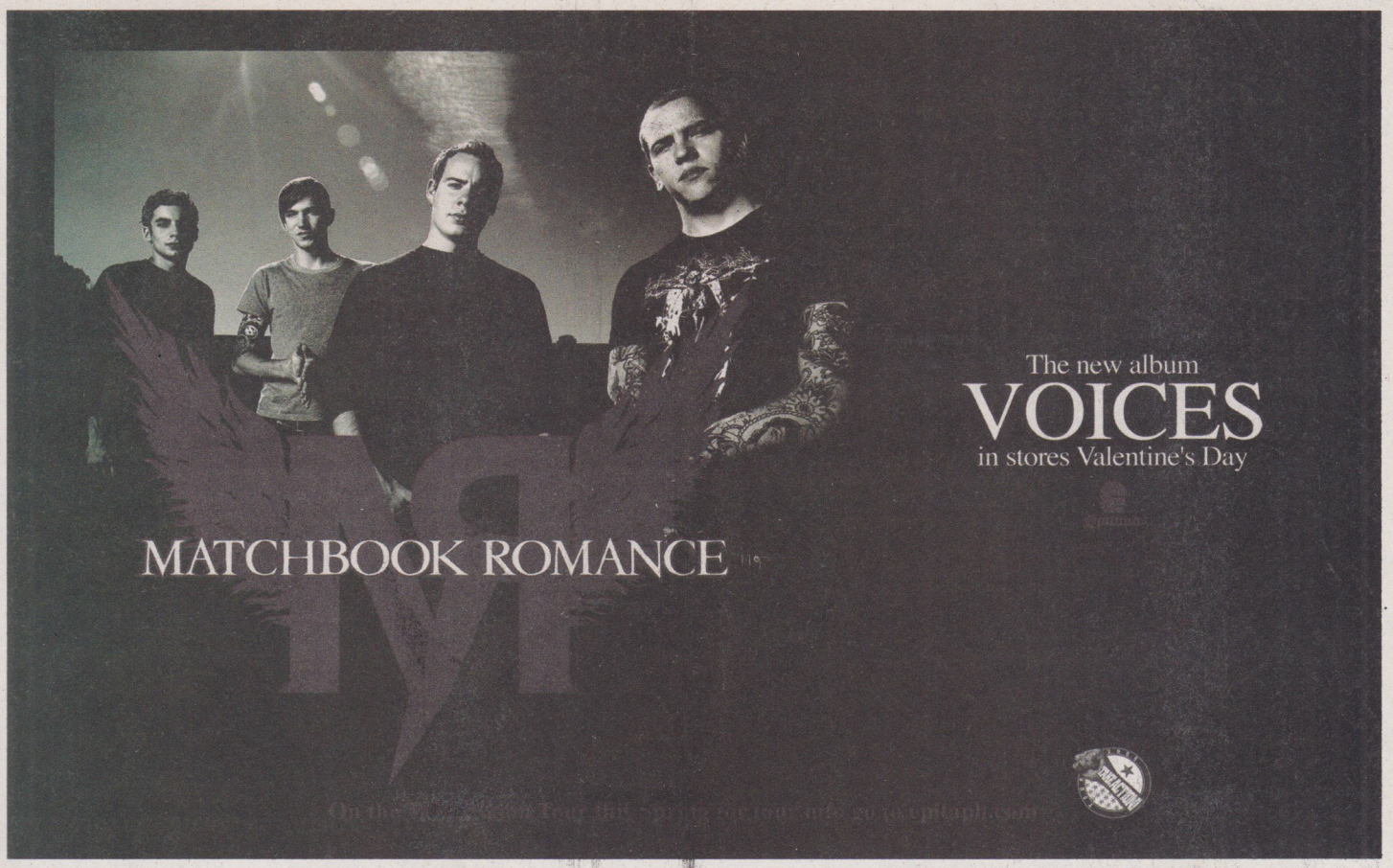
When can fans expect to see a follow up to "Actual Air?" Or just another book from David Berman in general?
In 2007.

Do you have a favorite Yiddish word? If so, what does it translate to in English?
A Yiddish proverb: "Dort vu men hot dich lib, gai vainik; vu men hot dich feint, gai gor nit." "Where people love you, go rarely, where you are hated go not at all."

Do the Silver Jews have a message for the children?
"Aider azoi foren iz besser tsu fus gaien." "It's better to walk than to ride like that."

dragcity.com

2005 "Tanglewood Numbers" (Drag City)
2001 "Bright Flight" (Drag City)
1998 "American Water" (Drag City)
1996 "The Natural Bridge" (Drag City)
1994 "Starlite Walker" (Drag City)
1993 "The Arizona Record" (Drag City)
1992 "Dime Map Of The Reef" (Drag City)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METRIC

by Sebastian Ulloa

What do you get when you mix an India-born Canada-raised art-schooled daughter of a jazz poet singing and playing keyboard (Emily Haines), a classical trumpet playing Juliard dropout turned guitarist (Jimmy Shaw), the great-grandson of the American national anthem's composer to play Drums (Joules Scott-Key), new wave savvy, smart and subtle politics, and another Texan on bass (Josh Winstead)? You get Metric, proof that smart is sexy, and one of the best parts of what's been referred to as the "Canadian Invasion". Metric recorded a full length and an Ep in 2001 that never officially got released. Since their "debut" album, "Old World Underground, Where are You Now?" came out in 2003, things have been looking very good for the Toronto based four piece. The album just went gold in Canada, and they have been selling out shows across the country (and in France) in support of their latest release, "Live it Out". They are also featured in a French film in which they play themselves. To top it all off, they just secured an opening spot for the Rolling Stones in New York. The fucking Stones! Jimmy and Joules took some time out before sound check to talk.

You have to carefully control who your crowd is, because you're going to spend a lot of time with them.

You guys had a rough start. Has touring since "Old World Underground..." gotten easier or more enjoyable?
Jimmy Shaw: Yeah, for sure. As more people show up and the crowd gets bigger and better, we're making more money and we have more of a crew. It definitely gets better.

Why'd you decide to move to New York from Canada?
Shaw: All four of us? We all went there sort of individually, on our own.
Joules Scott-Key: Well, the bass player and I went there to pursue a career in music... kind of why everyone goes.
Shaw: We all went there because it's New York, you know? Emily and I met first. I had already lived there, and then we moved back. These guys had just moved there at the same time, and we met a few years later.

Didn't you live in a flat with Karen O and Nick Zinner (from Yeah Yeah Yeahs)?
Shaw: Mostly Nick. Nick was there for like the whole five years that I was there. She moved in right as I left.

Nick's been all over the place with the cameos on other people's projects lately. Have you guys ever collaborated?
Shaw: Well, Emily and I play in Broken Social Scene with him and I've done some work with Stars. Whenever any of our friends are around, we usually end up playing with one another.

Why'd you guys move to LA?
Shaw: Because it was winter in Toronto.

Had you already moved out of Brooklyn at the time?
Shaw: Yeah, we moved out of Brooklyn right after Sept. 11. We stayed in Toronto for like three months and then we decided to move to LA.

Is that why you moved out of Brooklyn, because of Sept. 11?
Shaw: Pretty Much...
Key: It had a lot to do with it. Yeah, there were too many guys with fatigues and semi-automatic rifles.

"Old World Underground, Where are You Now?" is often referred to as your debut, but why didn't "Grow Up and Blow Away" get officially released?
Shaw: It just got lost with a company merger... just some industry bullshit.

How do you feel about your older material, "Grow up and Blow Away" and the "Static Anonymity" EP?
Shaw: I'm glad it never got released. It's readily available online for anyone who wants to get it. Everyone who wants to hear it can hear it whenever they want.

Not particularly proud of it?
Shaw: No, I like it a lot. I think it's amazing that we have this whole record of potentially promotional material. You know, it worked out great.

At what point did you decide to add a bassist and live drummer?
Shaw: It was the idea that we had made a record and we couldn't do anything because the record didn't come out. If you are recording a project, you are at the mercy of the record label. If you're a live band you can do whatever you want.

You recorded "Live it Out" at home. How does that compare to recording in a professional studio?
Shaw: Yeah, you probably lose some fidelity somewhere along the line. I soundproofed our recording room for like $200. It's not like it's professionally done, but it sounded pretty good. We got lucky, but you probably lose a little objectivity as well.

You've been named as being part of the "Canadian Invasion". Is there a Canadian Invasion and do you identify with it?
Key: Absolutely! Broken Social Scene, Stars. Arcade Fire, Wolf Parade, New Pornographers, Death From Above, Deadly Snakes...
Shaw: The list is fucking endless, man.

Did you live in LA long enough to really establish yourselves as an LA band?
Shaw: Yeah, totally. LA is where we got our first record deal, well not our first, but where we got the record deal that made "O.W.U." We played LA probably 30 or 40 times. We actually became Metric in LA.

What happened with Everloving, are they still distributing your record.
Shaw: Our contract was over, but they are still distributing "O.W.U."

Was it hard to maintain things in Toronto with half the band in the states?
Key: Not really, we just fly a lot. Whenever we fly we go in chunks, so we work it out.
Shaw: We're working enough so that when we're working we don't also need to be working.

Yeah, so how'd you get the same place that you moved out of after Sept 11. in Toronto?
Shaw: It was owned by this guy, and he called me this summer and said I'm leaving the place for good. If you want it you can have it. That kind of dictated why we went there and made the record there.

What did you study at Juliard, and why'd you stop attending?
Shaw: I studied classical trumpet. I didn't want to be involved in classical music anymore. Those people are really boring, and I really didn't want to be surrounded by those people for the rest of my life. I still play trumpet in Broken Social Scene.

There's like 6 videos for the last album. Are there going to be that many for the new record?
Shaw: I don't know. Probably not, because when you're unknown and obviously poor like we were when we were doing "Old World," people do a lot of videos for you for free. Now, anyone that does a video is going to want us to pay for it. We're not going to spend $50,000 on five or six videos. We'll probably make two or three.

Have you felt any push or pull with older fans as you get more popular?
Shaw: I don't really think we've had issues with that. There's just been a nice steady increase with what we're doing.
Key: We're finding out that people are assuming that we're bigger than we are. We're not overnight sensations or anything.

Emily once said something about an initial fear that "if your audience grows, suddenly it's going to be a bunch of frat boys."
Shaw: You have to carefully control who your crowd is, because you're going to spend a lot of time with them.

ilovemetric.com

2005 "Live it Out" (Last Gang)
2003 "Old World Underground, Where are you now?" (Everloving)
2001 "Static Anonymity" (Unreleased)

Photo: Victoria Shizuka deVine

THE LADIES

by Dailyn Brown

What happens when you put the multifaceted talents of Rob Crow (Pinback, Goblin Cock) and Zach Hill (Hella, Toughguy Fantasy, Team Sleep) the most creative drummer to come out of California, in a room? You get the ultimately unique album of indie-motherfuckin'-rock called "They Mean Us" under the moniker, The Ladies. The pairing of Crow's stellar guitar and Hill's erratic and complex drumming is a step above the mellow Pinback sound. Sticking to imaginative melodies, the album also showcases Hill's drumming in a more accessible style.

Crow is a man of few words but he took a break between his various musical projects to speak with Modern Fix about his complex and fascinating music.

Any hints on why you call yourselves, "The Ladies"?
Because we are "The Ladies." Like at shows when guys say, "This one's for the ladies" or "This is ladies only." They mean us.

You've worked with Zach Hill before, how was making The Ladies album different from the past collaborations? Did you have more say in the musical process?
It was the first time we got to work together while being in the same room. With Team Sleep I would just go in and do whatever and with Holy Smokes. He just drums and I did the rest at home. I would just write songs to a drum part.

In that vein, I have noticed that you make most of your music with a drum machine. Why is that? Is it easier than finding a steady drummer?
The only reason I end up working with drum machines a lot is because it's a necessity. I can't afford to go about it any other way. It's hard to record drums in your bedroom. That's the whole reason. Zach has a little studio at his place and we record in my room.

What did you do to vent out all of your creative energy before you started making music?
Oh, it's a long story.

What was the first instrument you picked up?
The guitar; it's all I ever wanted to do when I grew up. I've always wanted to make music.

Do you find it hard balancing all your different musical projects? Do you like to keep them very separate?
Sometimes it gets kinda difficult.

Do you miss Heavy Vegetable?
Yeah, but we have been rehearsing lately. We just finished a record as a different band but with all the same guys. I am very happy with it.

These days you are known best for Pinback. What do you think about how influential your music is becoming?
I don't know? It's really hard for me to imagine someone even liking anything I do. That's not something I think about.

Does it make you feel uncomfortable?
Maybe for them...a lot of what I did was just really depressing to me because I was really depressed and if people liked it I guess that means they were depressed too maybe? I'm always glad when people like stuff and I like having conversations with people about music and so that's good.

You play a lot of different instruments. What would you say is your top choice at the end of the day when you just want to play around?
The ukulele or the banjo or whatever is closest. Those are the easiest things to play while watching television. Usually I have to stop relaxing if I'm fooling around and go, "Oh that's good."

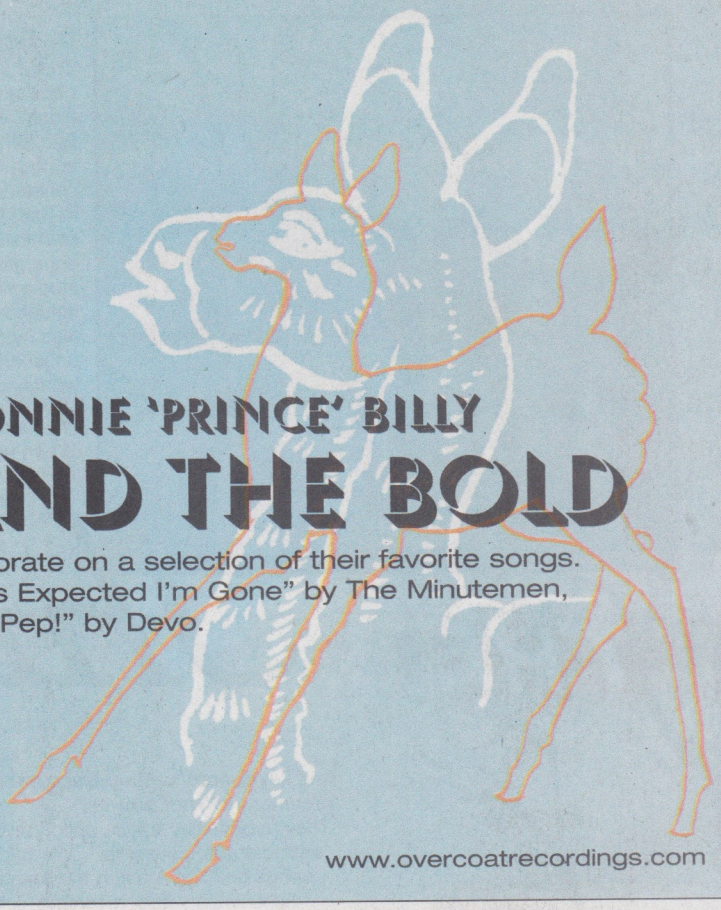
You aren't working anymore, that must be nice.
I don't know? A lot of the time I just wasn't even able to work. I would just be broke. It's been that way for most of my life. In the last few years, maybe 4 or 5, I've been able to survive off my music.

So, when are The Ladies touring?
Not sure when. We were going to try and tour in March but Zach couldn't do it. We want to tour and write a new record as soon as possible after the Goblin Cock tour in March and before the next Pinback tour, but if not after that.

Does that mean that Pinback is in the studio again?
We have been trying to get together. I am supposed to be at Zack's (Smith) house now but I don't think I'm going to make it today.

temporaryresidence.com

2006 "They Mean Us" (Temporary Residence)



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by Barry Dejasu

Thrice have never been able to fit the molds of genre-classification. Sure, the members have always been the same, but with each album, the band's sound is startlingly different. "For us, it's about constant growth," says drummer Riley Breckenridge, "expanding what we can do as a band, improving as musicians and songwriters, challenging ourselves and the people that listen to us. I think we're constantly evolving, which is exciting. Some bands find what works, and stick with it, (but) for us, it's more fun and challenging to find what works, and then find more stuff that works, and more stuff, (incorporating) new influences and ideas... and continue growing and expanding what we can do." Now, with the release of their fourth studio album, "Vheissu" Thrice have evolved once again. "There's less of a metal influence on this record," Riley comments. "I think as a whole, we are listening to less metal than we were a few years ago, and as a result it's not a huge influence on what we wrote for Vheissu. It just wasn't where our heads were at. We wrote whatever came naturally for us, and coincidentally, none of it was very metal."

Thrice

Digital wolves and coffee.

How would you describe Thrice's evolution, album-to-album?

When we started, we were mainly influenced by punk rock, and it showed. Then the metal and hardcore influence started to creep in around the "Identity Crisis" and "The Illusion of Safety" days. As we grew as people and as a band, we started listening to more kinds of music. Over the last two records, we've branched out, broadened our influences and our sound.

Are keyboards/synthesizers becoming more and more prevalent in your sound?

They're definitely a nice option to have and a great way to add textures our songs. We had wanted to add keys to songs on "The Artist in the Ambulance" but because of a tight writing and recording schedule, we didn't really have time to incorporate them on that record. Luckily, this time around we had a good amount of time to experiment with instrumentation. While I don't think we'll ever become a synth-and-key-heavy band, it's nice to know that they're a possibility.

What were some of the bigger inspirations for on Vheissu?

There are too many to list, because everyone in the band writes, and everyone in the band is influenced by different stuff. If I had to pick a few collective influences, I'd say Radiohead, No Knife, Botch, Isis, Danny Elfman soundtracks, a bunch of jazz and singer/songwriter stuff, etc. There's more, I just don't want this to be a rambling list of bands.

This is probably the question of the year for you guys, but just what DOES "Vheissu" mean? And how is it pronounced?

We pronounce it VEE-SOO, but it's not a real word, so we can't really be sticklers about the pronunciation. There's no dictionary definition for it, which is a big reason why we chose it. We wanted a title that would just represent the album, and not hint at any themes, concepts, or emotions that the record deals with. We did a little research to see if it actually meant anything and found that the word had been deconstructed by literary critics. They'd found that it could possibly be derived from the German phrase for "who are you?", which we found to be particularly interesting because Dustin's lyrics over the years have dealt with how you define yourself as a person, what makes you who you are, and how you go about searching for knowledge and truth.

Recently, you guys held a series of acoustic shows. Did these influence your sound, or have some kind of resultant effect on "Vheissu"?

We originally did it as a way to show people that we could do more than just scream and yell and play fast and heavy. In doing that, we had a lot of fun and it kind of opened up new doors for us musically as far as arrangements and dynamics go. We tried to incorporate that on "Vheissu" and share that diversity with people that might not have the chance to see us at an in-store.

What are the songs on "Vheissu" about exactly?

Digital wolves and coffee. Nah. It's meant to be interpreted on an individual basis. They might mean something different to each person that listens to them. I'd hate to have someone be moved by a song of ours, and then tell them that what they're feeling is wrong. It's art, not math.

"The Earth Will Shake" seems to be about, or set in, a prison.

The acapella section is influenced by some old prison recordings, yes. The song itself, if taken absolutely literally could be set in or about a prison, but I'd hope that people would look beyond just a literal meaning of the lyrics.

Does Thrice have any immediate plans for future work?

We are going to be putting out an EP in conjunction with "Red Sky" being released as the second single. It will have a radio edit of "Red Sky", a few acoustic songs, and a b-side or two. We are still hammering out the details. As for a new full length, it's going to be dictated by our touring schedule. As of now, there's a chance we'll be home for a few months this summer and we've discussed writing some of a new record during that break.

Anything else you want to say?

Yes. I'd like to say a few words. Yogurt. Moose. Pantsuit. Oh, and thanks for the interview.

thrice.net

2005 "Vheissu" (Island)
2004 "If We Could Only See Us Now" (Island)
2003 "The Artist in the Ambulance" (Island)
2002 "The Illusion of Safety" (Sub City)
2001 "Identity Crisis" (Sub City)

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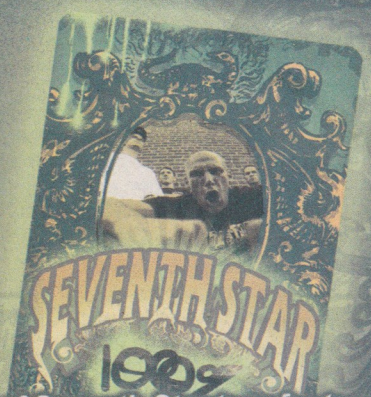

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ABERDEEN CITY

by Beth Fhaner

How many bands currently making gorgeous melodic rock can claim they're fronted by a guy who grew up as a violinist? Aberdeen City is one such outfit. Lead singer and bassist Brad Parker, who cites classical music as a major influence, fronts the Boston-based quartet, whose first full-length, "The Freezing Atlantic" was released last fall. Although the foursome's intense music has been compared to Interpol and Radiohead, Aberdeen City's sweeping, dark, sophisticated sound is definitely all their own. Parker's haunting vocals on songs such as, "God is Going to Get Sick of Me", "The Arrival" and "In Combat" convey emotions of angst and isolation, yet overall, the music creates a stunning, cathartic effect.

IGuitarist J. Ryan Heller, drummer Rob McCaffrey, and Parker all grew up together in the same Chicago neighborhood, but it wasn't until they reunited at Boston College that they got the band together. Guitarist and vocalist Chris McLaughlin, a local DJ and BC student, was added to the lineup, and after their first bassist, another BC alum, left the band, Parker decided to pick up the bass. The innovative singer/songwriter readily admits that he doesn't really know much about bass playing, but he's learning. "I am sort of a guitarist in a bass player's clothing," jokes Aberdeen City's frontman, who flashes his wicked sense of humor every now and then. Amidst a busy schedule of touring and preparing to head to SXSW, Parker was kind enough to answer a few questions for Modern Fix.

Your band's name refers to an area in Boston, correct?
Its genesis comes from a run-down apartment where most of us lived. In the entryway, there was a tile mosaic on the floor that said, "Aberdeen". Later, we learned that there was a family of that name who built a bunch of homes in the area around the turn of the century. It wasn't until someone threatened to sue us for use of the name "Aberdeen" that we added the "City". We couldn't decide on what word to add to the name, but another band accidentally listed us as "Aberdeen City" on their site, so we went with it.

What was it like recording "The Freezing Atlantic" in a studio up in the Catskills?
What a wonderful, desolate place to be in February! It was very peaceful up in the mountains. Good place to clear the head and focus. The studio itself, Ranch Studios, was really quirky, very individual and fairly drafty - an excellent workspace. It's heated by a wood-burning stove and filled with strange odds and ends from years gone by. There are pictures of it on our website. The story goes that in its heyday it was a hang out for the country-western crowd. They would want to get out of New York and go riding, spend the weekend on the ranch.

How has your background as a classically-trained violinist informed the music you create today?
The classical background is central to what I do. It laid the groundwork for how I hear, feel, and understand music. It taught me to appreciate that the underlying pain and emotion in music is the same whether it is coming from a violin or Maynard James Keenan. There is a great reward in listening to music done on that scale that is often hard to find in popular music.

It just feels better than writing about that great night out or how dangerous I am on the dance floor. Which I am - deadly!

How would you describe Aberdeen City's sound to someone who isn't familiar with your music?
Overall, it is a big, emotional, melodic form of rock - sometimes fast and hard, sometimes slow and mournful.

Were there any certain themes that you were exploring on "The Freezing Atlantic"?
I think I have an ambivalent relationship with words. I hear the mood and message from a song in the melody. It always says so much more to me before there are words attached, because while the melody stays the same, I change and interpret that differently with each listen. Sometimes it may be a damning message, other times it might be comforting. I try to exorcise personal 'demons' and leave the pain in the song so I don't need to carry it around with me. It makes life more manageable. So I find myself addressing themes of pain, regret, doubt, failure, isolation... you name it. It just feels better than writing about that great night out or how dangerous I am on the dance floor. Which I am - deadly!

Out of all the songs you've written, do you have a favorite?
My favorite to play is usually "Brighton". It starts slow and builds to a scream. Some nights I feel like I might pass out. There have been a couple of times where I could barely sing the final chorus and, in the end, that is what makes music such a special thing to do.

What have you been listening to lately?
I just became a Ryan Adams fan because of "29". I resisted for years. He always wrote great melodies, but I felt like he didn't rock enough when he was rocking and I wasn't convinced of his feeling behind the ballads, but I am a fan now. It is truly a beautiful album. I'm also listening to the Birthday Party's first widely-released album "Prayers on Fire". Nick Cave is a savage and great lyricist, the kind of musician one can take many lessons from.

Will you always be a Boston-based band? What do you think of the music scene there?
I think that our 'base' has as much to do with our lives outside of music, as it does as a home, identity, and context for the music. Boston has been a great place to make music, good community of musicians, plenty of rooms to play in. Truthfully though, I think it may become hard to pay rent in Boston if we keep touring around a lot, which is what we intend.

What do you ultimately hope your listeners get out of your music?
A little catharsis. Rock/Pop music has always been a place to address things, political, emotional, to get them out there and deal with them. I know these songs help me do that, hopefully, the listener can feel it too.

aberdeenmusic.com

2005 "The Freezing Atlantic" (Dovecote)
2003 "We Learned by Watching EP" (Self-Released)

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THE TOSSERS

If you ever hear someone in our position complain about it they should get their heads kicked in.

by Aaron Gudmunson

For the past decade, The Tossers have ruled the Irish folk-punk scene, bringing their unique music hybrid to clubs across the globe. The show is more than a show; it is an interaction. The band jams out the jigs and the audience jigs along in time. And everyone, I mean everyone, is drinking.

A Tossers show without liquor would be like Communion without some wafers o'Christ. And is this not a place to commune? Once the banjo begins plucking out its shining silver notes, accompanied by mandolin, guitar, bass, and drums, you might as well be in Dublin. And the liquor, my God, the liquor. Even a modest-sized venue can make its weight in gold on a night The Tossers come to play.

But the stage show is just the lip of the bottle. A new label, a new record, and the band just keeps getting better. Guitarist Mike Pawula took time to answer some questions about the record, the band, and Irishness in general.

Your new record, "The Valley of the Shadow of Death" was released by Victory Records. What prompted the switchover from Thick, who released your previous albums?
Mike Pawula: Thick was great to us, we had just fulfilled our contract and wanted a step up. We still have a good relationship with Zak and everyone we worked with at Thick. Victory has been able to give us the support that we were looking for and then some. Everyone has been great.

You just got off tour. Any standout moments you'd care to share?
We've had a great time with all the bands but we had the most fun with Murphy's Law. No crazy stories I guess, it was just great to open for a band that you've had so much respect for. And they're a great band.

The Tossers have been around over a decade. Have you arrived at the place you imagined yourselves at the band's inception?
I would say that we've gone further than we expected. When you play with so many bands in your career, you can see that it's an accomplishment to even stay together for 13 years. Every once in a while something cool happens that we didn't expect, and we get surprised because we never thought we'd get these opportunities, like touring with Murphy's Law or any number of great things that have happened that we couldn't expect.

Obviously, the band blends musical genres. Is this blend more often well-received or do you feel resistance from the hardcore punkers and/or folkers?
We're pretty well received but we do get slagged sometimes, probably more from the punker side. I don't think that we take it that seriously, we just do what we do. Sometimes it's pretty funny actually.

Modern rock music: "manufactured corporate drivel" or "has it moments"?
I would say that it has its moments, I guess. I'm not real good about picking on music I don't listen to. It means different things to different people. If it means something to somebody, that's good enough for me.

I am astounded at the sheer volume of alcohol consumed by both band and audience at a Tossers show. Who do you think drinks more on any given night, band or audience?
I know we drink a lot but you're asking if 7 people can out drink somewhere around 500 people in a given night, sometimes 7 nights a week. If we did we couldn't play our instruments.

Is everyone in the band of Irish heritage or do you cheat?
No, I guess you would say we cheat. We have one person in the band who is not of Irish heritage, but the rest of us have Irish in us to some degree.

If you didn't exist in music, how could you envision making a living?
I don't know. I'd probably get a job like anyone else. Maybe I'd sell shoes.

Is touring everything it's cracked up to be?
It's definitely not what people might think, but it's great. Anyone who says different should quit. If you ever hear someone in our position complain about it they should get their heads kicked in.

How do your loved ones cope with your extended collective absences?
That can get tough, but everyone is pretty much supportive. We missed part of Christmas this year so we could leave for a show, but our families understand. They've been living with it for years so it's nothing new.

What's the deepest lesson of life all this extensive touring has taught you?
I guess I haven't looked for any deep lessons. I have a great job where I can go out and play music I love every day and hang out with my friends. I just try to enjoy it because it could be gone at any time.

thetossers.com

2005 "The Valley of the Shadow of Death" (Victory)
2003 "Purgatory" (Thick)
2001 "Communication & Conviction: Last Seven Years" (Thick)
2001 "The First League out from Land" (Thick)
2000 "Long Dim Road" (Thick)
1996 "We'll Never Be Sober Again" (Folk You)

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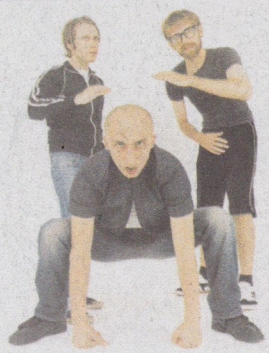

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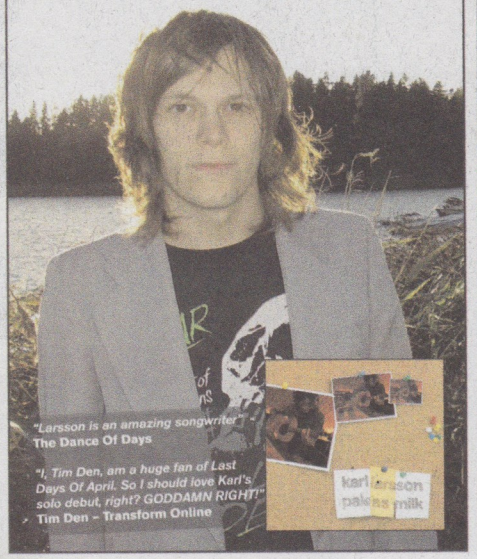

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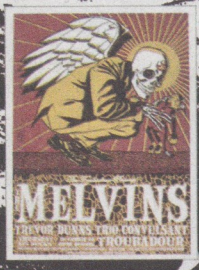

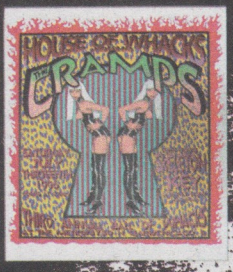

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HELLA

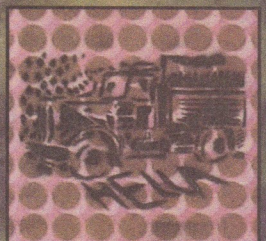
2005 "Concentration Face & Homeboy" (5 Rue Christine)

2005 "Church Gone Wild/Chirpin' Hard" (Suicide Squeeze)

2004 "The Devil Isn't Red" (5 Rue Christine)

2003 "Live" (Sickroom)

2003 "Total Bugs Bunny On Wild Bass" (Narnack)



2003 "Bitches Ain't Shit But Good People" (Suicide Squeeze)

2002 "Hold Your Horse Is" (5 Rue Christine)

HELLA

Diamonds in the Rough

by Gordon Downs
photos R.T. Thomas

2006. Remember when that seemed like such a distant year? It was the fodder that made the "Back to the Future" trilogy so intriguing. It gave the audience something unattainable: A Glimpse into the Future. If reality was in fact on the same schedule Robert Zemeckis had dreamed in his 1985 Orwellian masterpiece that would mean that civilization is just a few years away from skateboards that hover, and cars that are capable of flight. Unfortunately not much has changed since 1985 outside of advancements in computer science and the battle against erectile dysfunction. A simple glimpse at the current musical landscape would show that many musicians aren't necessarily progressing, in fact they're looking backwards to the past for inspiration.

While today's music may be vast in terms of genres and sub-genres, and the various labels people tend to slap on bands operating at the independent level, there are in fact a handful of musicians that are marching to a beat they've created solely on their own accord. Two of those musicians are Zach Hill and Spencer Seim, the Sacramento, California duo better known as Hella.

In terms of music that sounds as if it were transplanted from the future, Hella is indeed leading the pack in that category. Consisting of Hill on drums and Seim on guitar, the pairing of their technically sporadic skills is by far one of the most unique combinations in modern music.

While Hill attacks the drum kit like a skilled epileptic, Seim provides off kilter chords and picking techniques that when combined together, provide the perfect fusion between the aesthetics of punk rock and jazz. Hella's music is a mindfuck for many first time listeners, while others become instant fans. Perhaps one of the elements in making Hella an acquired taste is that live or on an album, Hella is definitely noisy and loud.

"Well it is noisy in that way," says guitarist Spencer Seim from his current residence in Grass Valley, California, "In that it's loud and we're doing a lot of different things. When I think of noise, I think of people

doing some freak out or something where they're just kind of swelling these sounds up and kind of hitting a bunch of different pedals or just banging around on their instruments in this kind of improvisational wave to create this void and chaos. I wouldn't put us in that category, the stuff we're doing as a two piece we're playing exactly how we've written them."

The category Seim is speaking of is known as 'noise rock'; an unfortunate label both Seim and Hill are associated with due to Hella's loud and aggressive stance towards instrumental compositions.
"Maybe it's just they haven't heard our stuff enough to make an accurate decision on what category they think we're in," he adds. "Because they more they listen to it the more they would realize it's more composed stuff and there is a pattern and things like that, rather than us just going off hitting the distortion pedal."

Hella's music could indeed be mistaken as a cacophony of clamoring noise, the kind of music that doesn't require much thought to process or create. Though upon a closer inspection of Hella's work, the music slowly reveals itself to be very specific and detailed compositions as opposed to improvisational freak outs.

Seim even refuses to use effects pedals, saying "I don't think it's for me. I kind of like to make effects with my guitar or with technique rather than a pedal. Though I do appreciate people that use them really well."

Up until their tour last year, Seim never considered using an effects pedal when performing. Though due to the amazing production on last year's double album, "Church Gone Wild / Chirpin' Hard" Seim was forced to use an effects pedal in order to replicate that sound live.

"On this last year of touring, when we were performing 'Church Gone Wild/ Chirpin' Hard' I was using a multi effects processor to get a lot of the sounds that both Zach and I got on the recordings."

As well as adding some effects to the mix, Hella known to fans and critics as a duo had to enlist the help of friends Jonathan Hischke and Dan Elkan to assist in their live performances.

"We wanted to perform stuff off those records," adds drummer Zach Hill, "we really enjoyed how those dudes went about playing their own things, and both Dan and Jonathan play with me in this other project I do called Holy Smokes. They're great dudes and awesome, amazing musicians, and we needed people to help us out temporarily for the whole touring cycle this past year."

Seim agrees wholeheartedly, "We really wanted to play stuff off 'Church Gone Wild / Chirpin' Hard' and in order to do that, we needed more people. We had some very talented friends that were wiling to give up a year and go out with us and travel around the world. They're just great guys, both of them are involved in other stuff. It was really cool to go out with them."

"I've been kind of out of it for awhile because I hurt both of my hands, so I stopped playing." Says touring member Dan Elkan. "So I haven't played music seriously for about three years. When my hands sort of started to get better that was when Zach made me do his other project Holy Smokes. When they asked me to do the Hella tour I was barely starting to play again. So they said, 'Let's just try it.' I thought it was weird that they'd want to take a risk like that. It went fine though. They had me doing keyboards, guitar, singing and doing samples. I was really nervous."

And if hitting the road with an established and unique act like Hella wasn't enough to jar someone's nerves, Hella found themselves opening up for The Mars Volta and System of a Down.

"It was definitely a weird setting for our band in some ways, but it was great fun." Seim says of the experience touring with System and Volta. "Just a month of that was great. We were all treated really well, and just everything that goes along with that is very smooth. It was obviously fun and interesting too, to be playing arenas every night for awhile. I was kind of expecting to get stuff thrown at us and things yelled at us, and I think we had one Chicklet thrown up on stage. That was only thing on that whole tour. I never really heard any real yelling or anything. I think the other guys heard a little something. I mean every once and awhile you'd look down and see someone in the front row flipping you off or something. But Volta got the same treatment, because the System fans are just waiting to see System."

Even at the small venues where seating capacity is but a few hundred if even that, Elkan was approached by devout Hella fans expecting a tainted form of their music.

"The vibe that I got on tour a lot, and I got this comment over and over again every night, at least one person if not ten people would come up and say, 'When I heard you guys were doing this as a four piece I was really worried. But it really blew my mind, it was amazing!'"

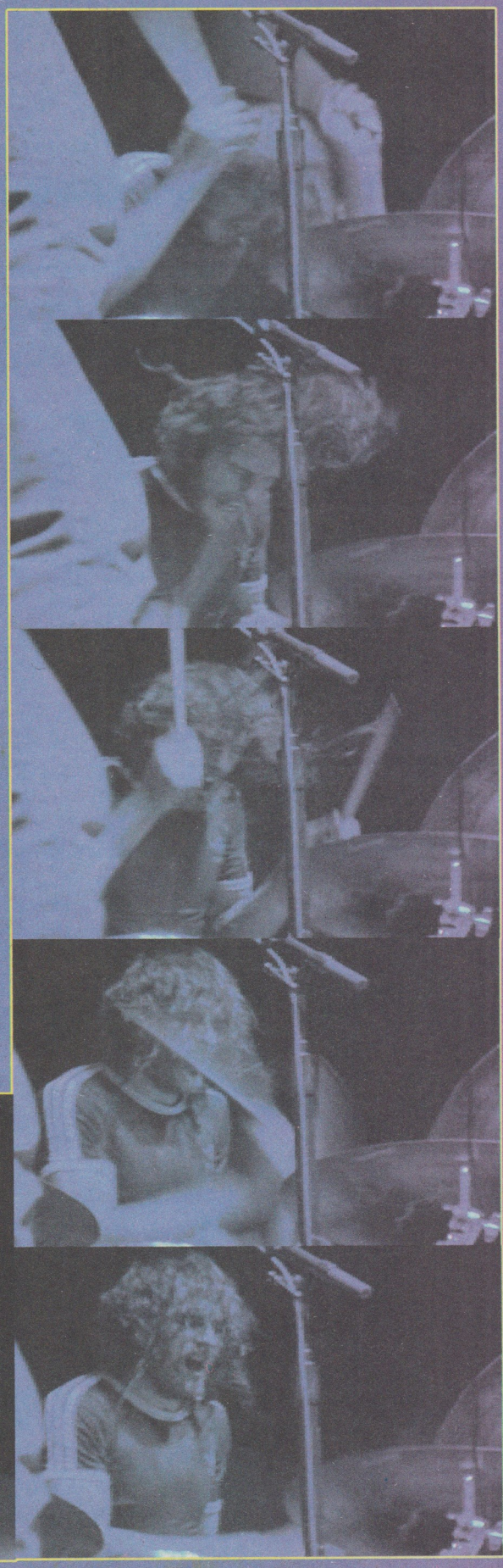
Hella's latest release is a CD/DVD combination entitled, "Concentration Face & Homeboy." "Homeboy" being a four song EP, and "Concentration Face" being the epic three hour tour documentary of Hella's first tour of Japan as a duo. Caught on tape by artist/filmmaker Ryan Thomas (aka R.T.), the film is a unique work of art, and an intricate look at Hella's live performance. Many of the images Thomas was able to capture while filming on stage with the band, a distinct perspective only available to a chosen few before.

It was in 2002 that Thomas first became acquainted with the band. "They played a show at a community art center up in Grass Valley." Thomas says of his first encounter with Hill and Seim. "Before Hella came on I was sitting in the back of the room, but when they started playing my jaw dropped and I frankensteined my way up to the very edge of the stage."

After meeting them through touring member Dan Elkan, Hill and Seim both embraced Thomas as a colleague and a friend.

"We'd share thoughts and ideas, and eventually a mutual artistic respect developed, Thomas continues. "We became good friends to the point where when they said they were gonna do a ten day tour in Japan I didn't hesitate to tell them I wanted to come along to document it."

I was kind of expecting to get stuff thrown at us and things yelled at us, and I think we had one Chicklet thrown up on stage.



"R.T. is just a super talented dude that has a really good artistic feel with film that a lot of people kind of lack." Seim adds to the director's credit. "He kind of goes for whatever he feels."

"From my prior experiences of filming with them I knew I was welcome to be as close to them onstage as I needed for a shot." Thomas recalls about shooting the footage that would become "Concentration Face." "So close in fact that during the first Tokyo show I was squatted unaware over Spencer's channel switch as I was filming Zach from across his ride and when I panned back to Spencer it came at a time when he needed to step on the switch, but he couldn't cause I was blocking him from it. He had to lift me up with his pick hand in the middle of a song to get to it. It was comedy for both of us."

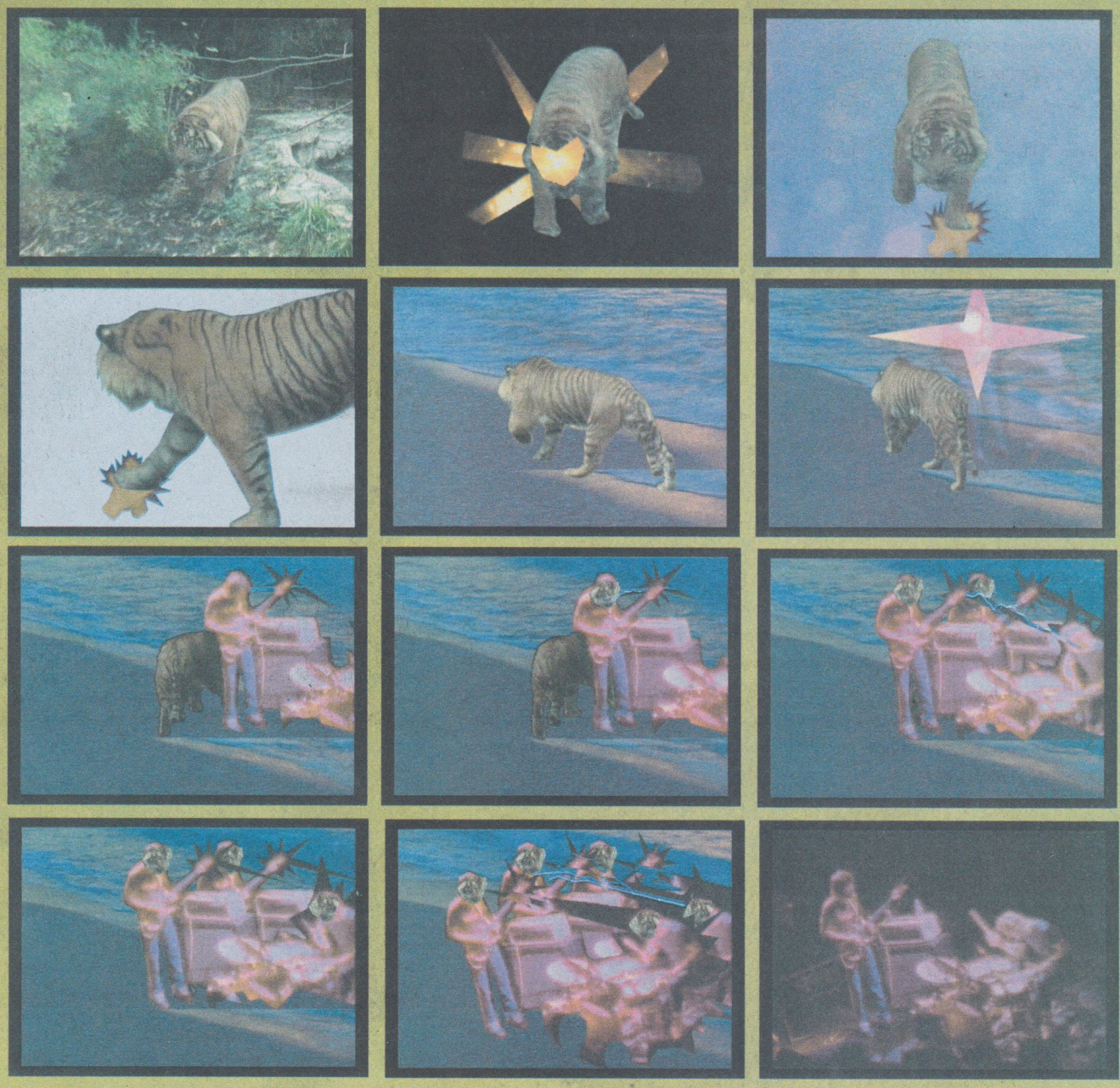
"He's just a really amazing dude." Hill says of the films director. "We just gave our two cents on whatever he was doing at the time. So we only had a small part to do other than playing and being ourselves. The film is pretty much his vision."

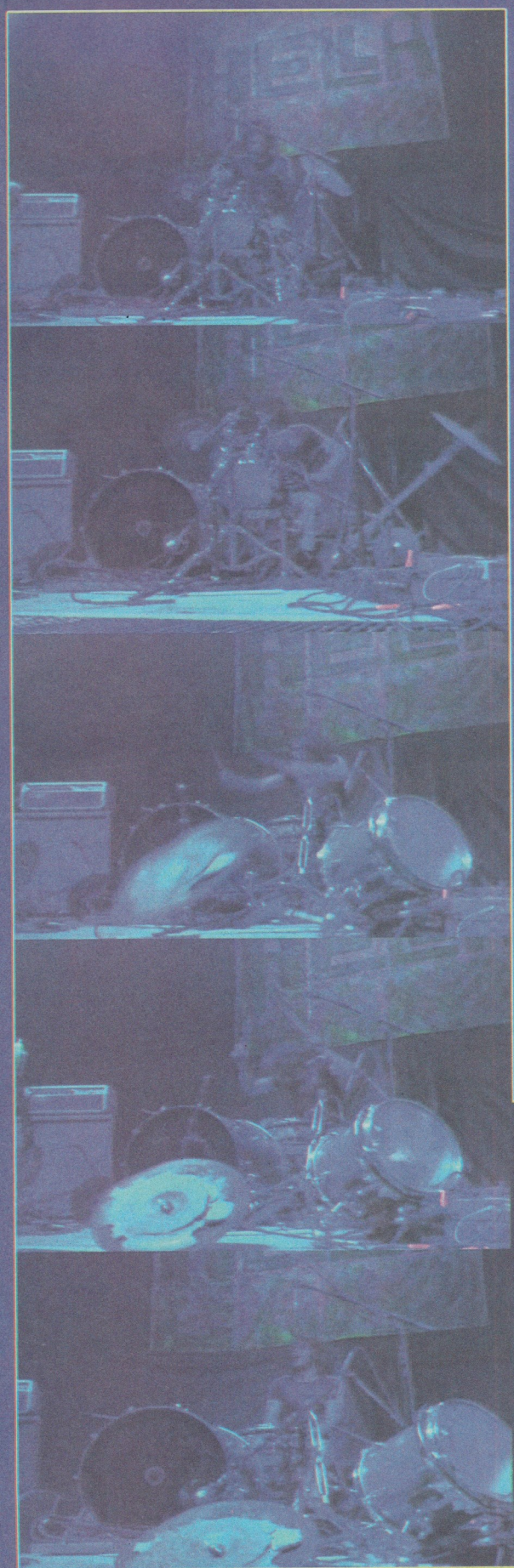
"It was his choice to put that whole show on there," Seim says of the DVD's inclusion of their entire final performance of that Japan tour. "That show fell apart. There's a twenty minute gap in the middle as stuff's breaking, and that's something to him that he thought would be awesome to show. I think we both respect him enough to just go with it and I think it turned out rad."

"I knew that it would probably turn out pretty long," Hill says of the films nearly three hour running time. "I knew there was going to be so much stuff to go through, that it probably was going to be hard to narrow it down. So I assumed it would have a pretty lengthy running time."

"A lot of the footage in part one comes from the hand held camera, which is a lot of moving one-shot coverage of the shows." Thomas adds. "It moves you around the stage organically throughout a song as opposed to hard cutting to change angles. It's definitely a challenge to be on stage with one camera and say to yourself, 'OK how am I gonna keep a one-shot interesting?' But ultimately, as long as I found the right angles it's Hella that kept it interesting. The one-shot kind of gives it to them without the artifices of over abundant, frenetic editing. It definitely made for a look and feeling, a purity that I was then able to contrast stylistically with part two which is the entire last Tokyo show where, with the help of Japanese cameramen Dai Soma and Maasaki Endo, I was able to have four cameras running and therefore a more edit heavy approach. In the end I decided to take the less conventional route and wrap it all into one piece without caring

That show fell apart. There's a twenty minute gap in the middle as stuff's breaking...





if people end up watching it bits at a time. It's OK if it takes someone kickin' at home more than one sitting to watch a film, and if you dig Hella odds are that you'll be stoked on everything that's in there no matter how many times you turn it on, off, and on."

After spending more than half of last year on the road, both Seim and Hill are resigned to spending the first half of 2006 writing and recording new material. "That's all we'll be doing is recording." Seim breathes with relief.

And while fans of Hella may be yearning for more of the same, Hill and Seim are operating on a different agenda.

"We don't make the same record again ever. That's our whole thing." Hill explains about working on their next album. "Basically the whole idea of what we're going to do next is all mapped out, but I wouldn't really know how to go about explaining it. We're really excited about the material that we're doing right now. I don't really want to get into detail about who's doing what and how many people are doing this and that. That's kind of left to be a surprise, but I do believe it's going to throw our band in a different perspective. It's going to be a definite progression. I can tell you that. I'm cautious about talking about it."

"It'll be an evolution." Seim says of Hella's next album. "It's gonna be a whole new thing I can tell you that."

So for the better part of 2006, Hella will be hold up in Grass Valley, California, writing and recording material for their next release which will see a street date on Ipecac Records sometime in the fall or early winter of this year. With no imminent tour plans scheduled thus far, devout fans of Hella may be able to find solace in the memory of friend and tour manager Joe Meade, who's seen the band perform live almost three hundred times. When I inquired as to what his favorite memory of watching Hella perform live was, Meade quickly recalled a show in Texas. "There was this show in Houston. It was summer and 140 degrees in the club with no air conditioning. There were about 150 kids there that night and Zach, hit his ride so hard that it inverted it. It just sprung up! At that moment the whole place went crazy, I thought there was going to be a riot. I saw a kid turn to the person next to him and start shaking them, I saw some dude pull his hair out. Everyone just went crazy."

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AS FEATURED ON MUSIC CHOICE

Shoplifting

by Jeremiah Griffey

Every once in a while an album bores through your neural synapses, leaving you mind-fucked, titillated and thoroughly entertained. You dive for the lyric booklet, or if one's not available you search for the lyrics online. If that's not available you sit and concentrate. Perhaps your eyes are closed as you decipher the hidden codes encrypted by the punk rockers your ears imbibe. When the album arrives from a source that surprises you, it's all the more succulent.

I saw Shoplifting last year with The Peppermints, Wives and Spider and the Webs, a rather drab show all the way around. The Peppermints were about to part ways with guitarist Grm Graham (and it showed), Wives were playing live for the first or second time after a hiatus and Spider and the Webs, well, let's just say they're not my cup of tea. Shoplifting was the lone bright star of the show, and even they left me wanting. Except for when Hannah Blilie, freshly tapped to takeover drums for The Gossip, sang. There was something special there, but it just turned out I wasn't really in the mood for a show.

So, when "Body Stories" arrived on my desk, I prepared for a decent post-punk band cross-bred with riot grrl sensibilities. Instead, the album was the first album of 2006 to capture me.

Blilie's vocal interactions with Chris Pugmire elevate Shoplifting into another musical realm - a hypnotic calling that transcends the idea of post-punk. When they sing about gender the cultural complexities of sexual politics begin to make sense (or not make sense, depending on your opinions). When they sing together about rape, it cuts through your soul. When they call you to arms, you ask where to sign up.

"I love singing with Hannah because there are already a lot of layers to our lyrics and adding our 'masculine' and 'feminine' voices, which I think flow in and out of those roles, to the mix just adds that many more layers," Pugmire says. "It leaves the songs more freedom."

Shoplifting illustrates the band's theoretical complexity on "Male Gynecology", a poignant look at gender constructions: "Finally gonna own my body / Open wide to my own gynecology / There's no shame if the self exam's bloody / There's no shame in possibility."

"I'm more or less obsessed with the various ways that gender is constructed, male gender in particular," Pugmire says. "But it's not like an 'Ivory Tower' philosophical thing (not negating the importance of some of those ideas). I think it's more practical than that. It's, among other things, self-examining my gender within the context of my life, in everyday situations and as kind of an overview, and taking control of my gender and my identity instead of letting it be dictated by other people or society or whatever. Plus there's barely any people - at least that I know of - that identify as guys talking about this sort of stuff within music. So it's important in that sense, I mean it would be a big waste of time for us to be singing about the exact stuff everyone else sings about, you know?"

Anyone who's spent any time in college probably attended or actively participated in some kind of Take Back the Night anti-rape rally. If you weren't a victim of sexual abuse or didn't know one, these rallies are an eye (and tear duct) opening experiences. They're empowering, beautiful, community building experiences - so much so that sometimes you get lost and forget why you're really there. You hear the stories. You weep. You feel worse. You feel better. It's a whirlwind of emotions so overwhelming that the tears mask the crime and the anger. Perhaps that's why songs like "Talk of the Town," which tells an everyman's tale of rape coupled with a revolutionary sense of outrage, are so important.

"That song is about friends' experiences surviving sexual violence, my experience surviving sexual violence, and dealing with people who've violated us or our friends and the people that actively or silently support them," Pugmire says. "It has a few different narratives happening. Like for instance, a friend of ours who was visiting from out of town was raped by this dude who was popular in the music scene. Of course because she was drunk and didn't go to the police, no one believed her and the community (including us) that tried to hold this guy accountable were written off as witch-hunters, you know, totally hysterical. So that song is mainly a song of empowerment for survivors and their allies, and also a big 'fuck you' to those kinds of people, hipsters so enthralled by their cocaine and liberals with their "let the police and courts sort it out" attitude and their unconscious, or naked, sexism and misogyny. They don't wanna think about it or have to deal with it. And I think they should. That's what all the 'DEFINE' parts are about, you know, 'TELL ME WHAT RAPE MEANS.' The words wrote themselves, it wasn't hard."

Shoplifting formed after drummer Blilie, guitarist Devin Welch and bassist Michelle Nolan all left The Chromatics after the 2002 release of "Chrome Rats vs. Basement Rutz" (Gold Standard Labs). Pugmire joined the fray and they released a vinyl single and a self-titled EP on Kill Rock Stars. Nolan amicably left and was replaced by Melissa Lock for "Body Stories."

"Michelle leaving had a huge impact," Pugmire says. "It was devastating, but also a relief in a lot of ways. The four of us weren't completely healthy together. We still love her though. Her leaving forced us to completely reevaluate our reasoning for playing together, our commitment to each other, our writing processes, goals, etc. It ended up being really liberating because I think most people thought that we had just broken up so there was no real pressure or expectation. We just played."

It would seem experimental tracks like "Syncope Rider" and mellow tracks like "Claude Glass" reveal Shoplifting's looseness, if not in subject matter, at least with their instruments. The former, a haunting re-envisioning of Joy Division's moody goth stands out as the most avant-garde, if not promising meandering by the band. The latter tells a familiar tale of sexual negotiation, set to a Blilie-sung ballad. Each helps define Shoplifting as a band you're not going to easily define other than under the convenient blanket of "post-punk." Be prepared.

killrockstars.com

2006 "Body Stories" (Kill Rock Stars)
2005 "Shoplifting EP" (Kill Rock Stars)

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by Barry Dejasu

The year of 2005 was a busy one for this Swedish progressive metal band. After the joining of a sixth member (Per Wiberg on keyboards), as well as signing with one of the biggest and most famous metal labels (Roadrunner), Opeth managed to write and record their eighth full-length studio album, "Ghost Reveries".

Founding vocalist/guitarist/songwriter Mikael Åkerfeldt was quite happy about their new musical home. "They gave us one of the best offers." he says. "They were the most interesting label. They're a legendary, classic heavy metal record label. Plenty of legendary records came out on Roadrunner. Pestilence, King Diamond, stuff like that. Everybody knows they're a good, strong label. We met up with quite a few labels, (but Roadrunner) seemed like the best one."

In addition to a new label, Opeth also have a new member, Per Wiberg. What brought about his actual joining the band?

Mikael Åkerfeld: Well, he joined when we started touring. Before we started, "Ghost Reveries" we did an album called, "Damnation", and that album had lots of keyboards. So we needed someone to play those when we went out on tour. We had plans, he was actually meant to play on the record, but he was unavailable at the time. He ended up going on tour with us, and everybody liked him. The more gigs we did, the more freedom we gave him, and he started playing on the heavier songs as well.

Did his joining the band change Opeth's songwriting processes?

A little bit, yeah. It was a new instrument for me to toy around with. I mean, I can't really play the keyboards, but I learned from him. I'm quite infatuated with '60's-'70's sounds like the mellotron and Hammond organ and stuff like that. It was very interesting to write these songs with that

instrument in mind. We'd come up with something that originally had been for the acoustic guitar and translate that into piano to make it more interesting and diverse. It's fun, you know.

How do you normally write songs?
I write on a beat-up, old acoustic guitar that I've got, because it's the one that I accept more. It's the one on my wall, while the other guitars are in a cupboard. I play the guitar, I try to come up with something, and when I do, I record demos basically. If I come up with a riff, I usually come up with whatever comes before, and whatever comes up after, that riff, so it's almost like it writes itself in that way. When I record the demo, I try to make the demo complete and, like, professional-sounding, you know what I mean? I have a drum machine, I play the keyboards, I sing – I do all the vocals... I do as much as I can do. I kind of put every idea that I've got about that arrangement on (the demo); I put everything on it. I collect those arrangements until I have enough for a record, and then put it all together. It's much easier to show it to the other guys in the band so I've got the entire team to record it in the way I intended it to sound.

"Ghost Reveries" feels different than previous Opeth records. Aside from the obvious inclusion of a new instrument, was there something new you were trying to do?
I don't know. I'd like to think that it's got a new sound. I don't want Opeth to be a "dated" kind of band. We want to sound new, but not drastically. We've got our own sound, but we're trying to develop that sound. I think "Ghost Reveries" sounds different than the previous records. It's got more major sounds. I was afraid of the major chords. It's basically more progressive rock-sounding than before. It's probably the least "death metal" record that we've done. It still has a strong death metal influence, but compared to "Deliverance", it's definitely a big difference.

My other favorite subject is death. Nobody can say it's right or wrong, it's all very personal.

Way back when, on albums like "My Arms, Your Hearse" and "Still Life", there was sort of a central concept or theme. Is there anything like that with "Ghost Reveries", or were the songs more separate?
I started writing a concept, and most of the songs actually connected, but some songs aren't. When I came up with the song, "Isolation Years" it didn't have anything to do with the concept of this album's songs, but I was happy with the lyrics. I had grasped all the ideas for the concept, but because it wasn't really going anywhere, it was very, you know, kind of cryptic, as usual, and undefined. It was just basically occult ramblings for much of the time.

What are some of the songs about?
Well, the idea for the concept was, I wanted to write something influenced by the occult, bordering on Satanic, but not based on it, you know? I wanted to come up with some kind of a good fictional occult story, with a main character. I wanted to write about a simple subject, so I chose to write about demonic possession-slash-insanity, but not like spinning heads. It was more about things you could touch upon like every other person, like people around you, that we exist. It was more based on those kinds of things than about Satan.

More about the belief than about the actual reality of a presence.
Well, yeah, it was more about delusions. The main character is almost thinking he was possessed and the people around him are possessed by some evil entity, and he started acting like that. It does really question the existence of God or the Devil, it's basically just a fictional story. It's quite interesting, actually, my other favorite subject is death. Nobody can say it's right or wrong, it's all very personal.

Was "The Grand Conjuration" always planned to be a single, or did it just come about like that on its own?
Nah, it was never planned, we never plan for singles because we never really have singles. But when we signed with Roadrunner, they wanted to have some kind of video and single, but we're Opeth, we don't have singles. We made a video for that song. I think it was because it was the easiest song to edit.

So how do you feel about "Ghost Reveries", at least compared to your previous albums?
Well for me, it was the one I liked the most. It's always like that. I make sure that I don't absolutely hate the record when we write the songs. My intention is to write music that I like, myself. I've stopped listening to the album because I know it's good. It's a progression for the band, the songs are good, it has good songwriting, the production is good, the sound is good, the artwork is good, the reactions have been very good... there's nothing to complain about.

opeth.com

2005 "Ghost Reveries" (Roadrunner)
2003 "Damnation" (Koch)
2002 "Deliverance" (Koch)
2001 "Blackwater Park" (Koch)
1999 "Still Life" (Peaceville)
1997 "My Arms, Your Hearse" (Century Black)
1996 "Morningrise" (Century Black)
1995 "Orchid" (Candlelight)

bearvsshark

by EJ Binns

Creating a lot of hype in 2005 was tough. Sure, everyone couldn't stop talking about Michael Jackson dancing atop cars in front of courthouses, and somehow INXS became a household name once again, but no one expected the words "Bear Vs. Shark" to be spread like wildfire from coast to coast. Creating a lot of hype was just what the Michigan boys did when their latest effort, "Terrorhawk" was released June of last year. Unfortunately, immediately following the growing popularity, the quintet decided to call it quits claiming, "every one of us has too many individual idiosyncrasies" according to a statement made on their website.

You know, when a band breaks up, it's not always negative. If Engine Down still existed, we wouldn't have Denali. I mean, if the Beatles stayed together, we wouldn't have had the joy of Wings. Each one of the band members is a lifelong musician at heart, and we should expect to see something from each member sooner than later.

Although they might get stuck into the same "screamo" category as every other band that comes out today, this band definitely brought something special to the table, setting them apart from the onslaught of monotonous sounds out there. Their chaotic yet melodic sound is comparable to bands such as At The Drive-In and Small Brown Bike and even possibly some Cursive, but these guys were creating a genre all their own. With pull from such a huge variety of music, nearly every song had something fresh, giving every piece of the album a unique quality that keeps one listening. The vocals are a bit rough, but it seems to be the "in thing" to not be able to sing nowadays. Their live show made up about 2/3 of who Bear Vs. Shark was. While losing faith in the fact that there might be some entertainment left in a show out there, I was lucky to see Bear Vs. Shark just in time to rejuvenate my view of live music.

I was able to meet up with a few of the guys from Bear Vs Shark after they played one of their last shows at the Pontiac Grill on South Street in Philly. As with all Bear Vs. Shark shows, performance was an atomic blast of energy from the first chord hit to the last microphone thrown to the ground.

How long had BVS been playing together?
Ash: Since the fall of 2001.
John: It's going to be like 5, 5 1/2 years? Close to that

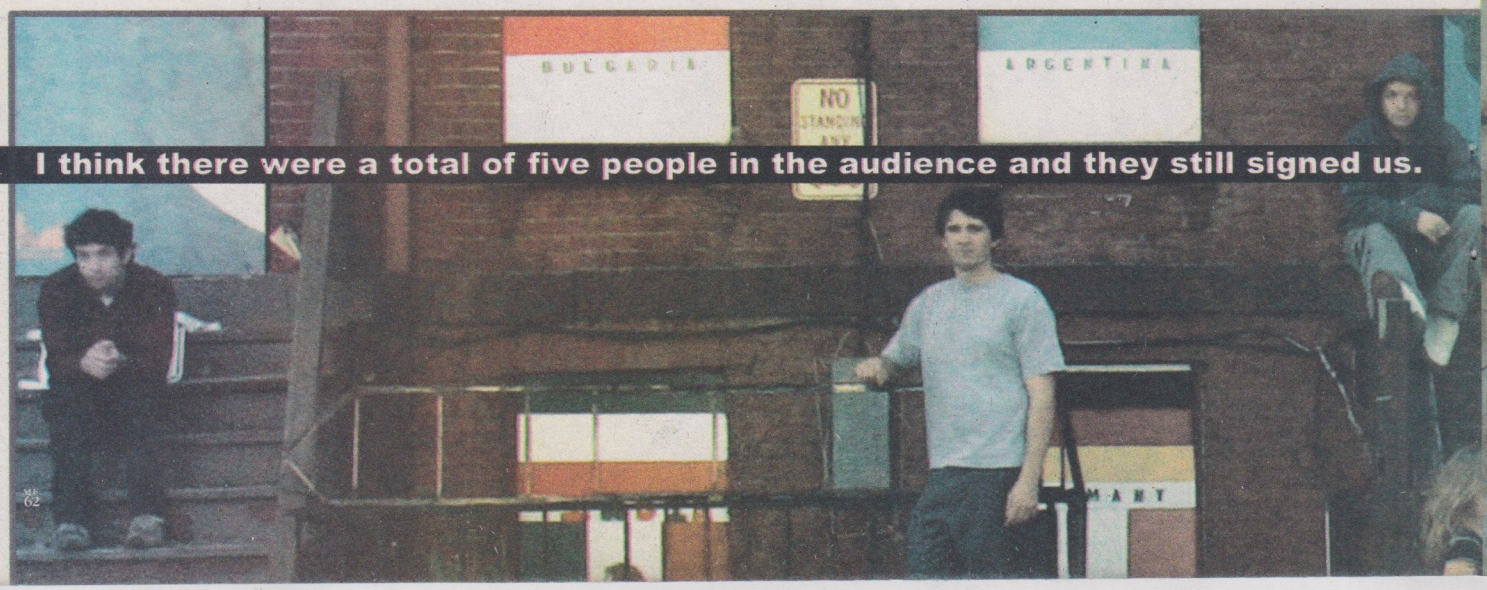
What is the music scene like in Ferndale?
Marc: We weren't really in Ferndale. We have been constantly moving around for the last 5 years. We grew up in a place called White Lake in Highland, Michigan.

How was the music out there?
All: Oh, there was no music, none at all.

So how did you guys start this up?
Marc: Well we lived in Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, (Michigan) a college town where people read books. So we started the band there. It was tough at first, but we started when we were in college, so it wasn't like we had any intentions of anything, we were just going to play music. We weren't thinking about anything else.

Your last tour was with a lot of Equal Vision bands. How does that label treat you?
Marc: Good. Very good. They are super cool. They have definitely given us a chance. We never had the opportunity to tour before. They came to a show to see us play, and I think there were a total of five people in the audience and they still signed us. It's been really nice. They are great guys.

Do you like touring with the other Equal Vision bands?
Marc: Uh, sometimes, (chuckles).
John: Well, Fear Before [The March of Flames] had been friends with us for a while. We both got our start at the same time, so we love touring with each other.
Marc: Ya, Fear Before are very, very old friends of ours. Fall of Troy are great kids. I can't say personally that I'm into a lot of music that is on the label but I like a lot of the people that are at the label, so, that's important.



the last interview

What bands would you like to tour with?
John: I want to tour with the new Hot Water band
Marc: I would like to tour with Against Me.
Ash: I would like to tour with the Constantines
Marc: Ya, the Constantines would be great. I would like to tour with the Tight Phantoms again.
John: Ya, they were awesome man. I'd like to go out with Billy Joel though.
Marc: Ya, I'd like to do Bruce Springsteen and hit up New Jersey. I like Bruce Springsteen.

Favorite city on tour?
Marc: Seattle is really cool.
Ash: I like San Francisco
Marc: The west coast definitely treats us pretty well.
John: San Diego!

How does the "Terror Hawk" release differ from "Right Now"?
Marc: I'd say it's completely different. It's more of a complete album. I'm sure a lot of bands say that about their second album, but I mean, we wrote it all in the same period of time rather than the first album, which was spread out over three years.
John: We were pretty used to being in the studio, where as the first album everything was new so you just did it and that was it. For this record we had time to prepare.
Ash: We wrote it within 6 months so the songs relate more, more connected.
John: We had things called "pre-production," you know, a lot of tech stuff.
Ash: (laughs) Ya, a lot of that technical cool stuff.
John: Ya, a lot of tech stuff, a lot of lasers, gears with geo-spheres and cool stuff. (All laughing)

Was it tougher to write an album in such a short period of time as opposed to the three years of combined writing time you took for "Right Now"? Any kind of pressure or anything?
Marc: Uh, no, no. Well, if we hadn't written it when we did, I'm sure they would have started to put pressure on us and then that would have compounded the situation. We have yet to deal with any deadline problems.

What can we expect from Bear vs. Shark in the future? (Eerily one month before the band broke up)
John: Actually we're talking a little bit of time off.
Marc: We are, actually, as soon as you're done talking to us, we're going to go downstairs and load up our gear and go home. We're going to relax for a few months, and then I actually don't know. I mean, tour, you know, of course.
John: Probably more vans, driving in vans.
Ash: Perhaps a tour down the Mississippi
Marc: Maybe a plane? Private jet? Is our label going to see this?
John: Oh ya, that tours in February.

How long do you plan on seeing yourself being together for?
Marc: Whoa. That was out of nowhere. (Laughs)

I mean, how long do you see yourselves playing music for? Are you still going to be screaming your lungs out and throwing yourself helplessly into the crowd when you're 60?
John: Oh, well, I'll be playing music forever, I'm sure all these guys will say the same.
Marc: I can guarantee every single one of these people in this band will be playing music for the rest of their lives.

Well, are there any other kinds of plans in the future in the area of other musical endeavors?
Marc: Well, Ash is going to join the Blue Man Group. He would really enjoy playing for them, other than that, that's pretty much it
Ash: I think I'm going to switch over to Broadway. Maybe, perhaps "Rent".

So this last record has just been getting insane amounts of play and buzz all across the country. What do you think is the main driving force behind this hysteria that is Bear Vs Shark?
Marc: Ya, it's actually doing well, but I don't know, I hope they come out to the shows, for Christ's sake. (In response to the sparse crowd attending that night)
John: Ya, a lot of people say "I like Bear vs. Shark, but am I gonna go to the show? That's a different question." Maybe Lost was on re-run or something. You know, something important.

bearvsshark.com

2005 "Terrorhawk" (Equal Vision)
2003 "Right Now You're In The Best of Hands. And If Something Isn't Quite Right, Your Doctor Will Know In A Hurry" (Equal Vision)

boy sets fire

Saying the right things at the wrong time for a lot of people.

by James Wright

To say the past few years have been difficult for Boysetsfire, might just be the understatement of the year. After releasing the scathing political record "Tomorrow Come Today" mere weeks after the September 11th attacks, the band was bitch slapped by a post-9/11 wave of fear and intimidation. Stuck with a record label that was scared to promote them and a public that was crucifying anyone who was criticizing the government, Boysetsfire were like a kid in high school that couldn't get laid even if he was waiving a $100 bill at a hooker.

Now, after a near break up and splitting with their former label, Boysetsfire have returned with "Misery Index: Notes from the Plague Years", a record that effortlessly bridges the gap between hardcore, punk and metal.

Undoubtedly the best record of the band's career, Boysetsfire frontman Nathan Grey discusses "Misery Index", the emotional roller coaster the band has been on and why some political bands need to stop being so socially inept, have a drink and talk football.

You guys have done it. 'Misery Index' is Boysetsfire's best record.

Nathan Grey: Thank you. Not to sound pigheaded or anything, but I would agree. It was one of those albums where we put it together and said, "Wow. That worked really well, didn't it?" It was like, if no one else likes it, then it'll still be my favorite record. We're pretty excited and it's exciting to see that other people are saying, "Yeah, this is great." We thought it was great, but you can't expect anything. It's nice to hear that other people like it too.

Can you give us some insight into the past couple of years for Boysetsfire?

It's been a living hell for the past two or three years. We did the "Tomorrow Come Today" album and after that, there were a couple of songs on that album that they wanted to use as singles. They wanted to use the "Bathory's Sainthood" but I wouldn't take out the word bastard from the song, so they couldn't sell it down south or something like that. They really weren't pushing the album because they were afraid of the politics involved. The end result that they were looking for was a radio friendly song and that's not really what we care about. We're writers and we write the music, we write the songs. If it works it works, but if it doesn't, it doesn't. At the end of all this, we called up the president of the company and asked him if he would let us go, and he did. It's no real fault on their part because that's what they do. They don't really do anything but radio. I'm pretty sure we were about a million bucks in the

hole with them. They let us keep our songs. We looked at the songs that we had written and we changed them back into what we wanted them to be.

When you signed to Wind-Up, did they not realize how political your band was at the time?
They knew it, but they signed us pre 9/11. It was okay to be political then. When we put out "Tomorrow Come Today" right after 9/11, it got a scathing review from the government and their involvement with it. They were scared shitless, the label sort of went into a panic. They put a disclaimer sticker on the album and they were horrified to take it to radio or anything because they didn't want to be associated with it.

You guys left a major label that was saying you aren't radio friendly and your record isn't marketable, but this is probably the most commercial Boysetsfire album yet.
I agree. I hope it plays out because I think that would be really funny. Almost in a vengeful way, if we were like, "We told you it's a great album." We'll see.

Can you give us some insight on the title of the record, "The Misery Index: Notes from the Plague Years".
The title came from a combination of a lot of things. It was supposed to put through the idea of what we've been through. Not just with the record labels and things like that, but what the country had gone through politically and what we had gone through personally. All of that went into this album. The political side, the music industry side, the emotional and personal issues all went into this album and they're all pretty negative. We didn't try to pump up the positivity on this one like we have in the past where we say, "Here's a problem, here's the answer, we need to do this." It's more like "Tough shit, we're not sure what to do here either. We're just pissed and upset and something's wrong." That's why it got titled the way it did. There's actually a song on the album called 'The Misery Index' and that's where part of it came from. That song's about being constantly being beaten down and just taking it.

Is it safe to say that all the trials and tribulations that you've gone through over the past few years have been channeled into the songs?
Oh absolutely, beaten into the songs. This album was probably the most difficult album we've ever written. Not just with our stuff, but once we decided to take it back into our own hands, it was fucking insane. We were trying to get it together, arguing and trying to figure out what we wanted to do. Throughout this whole thing, there's probably been close to three breakups, a few of us almost leaving. If it weren't for me and Josh being in the band, we'd probably be broken up by now. We sorta had to be the ones to be like, "Come on guys let's go, we can do it."

The album is overly political at a time when the majority of the population has returned to apathy.
It was really hard for us because after 9/11 and coming out with "Tomorrow Come Today" and that sort of shined on that because we were saying the right things at the wrong time for a lot of people. People were telling us, "Not yet, give it a year and then you can say that sort of stuff." We just say things when we want to. Now, it sort of seems like it took a turn, you have Mike from NOFX who all of a sudden got political. Not to say that he just jumped on the bandwagon, but everybody just sort of did it, who were previously completely disinterested in that sort of thing. For us, it was really difficult to take because we were thinking that now everyone's on the bandwagon, so now it's okay. That's bullshit. On this album, it was more like, "Let's get back into what we were before when we had political songs and emotional songs and people got that a little better." We thought it came off a little less preachy about the state of politics. We tried to make the political personal and the personal political and also try to exclude them from each other at other points. We wanted to make it something that not just something that we can relate to, but something that other people can relate to as well.

How do you combat people's attitudes where they think, "I'm just one person how I make a difference?"
Number one, I would try not to call it politics. As soon as people hear the word politics, they get bored out of their fucking minds. We try to say it more revolutionary and artistic. Politics, you think Democratic and Republican. You think guys in three piece suits taking advantage of you. You think horrible shit. Also, it doesn't have to be politics that people are making a difference in because it all becomes political. If it's music, art or politics, you can make a difference in yourself, your friends, your community and it fans out. It's important to remember that it doesn't have to take overnight and it doesn't have to be this thing where tomorrow you have to take over the world.

I'm pretty sure we were about a million bucks in the hole with them. They let us keep our songs.

On the other hand, you have this backlash of people that speak out against those that are critical of what's happening and say, "If you don't love America, get the fuck out."
That sucks. Just like we went through a period where people told us to stop preaching. We thought "Fuck them, we can do what we want." And then we started thinking that if we cut down on the amount of talking and just made it to the point, people will get the point better. If you put your ego aside for a minute and listen to what people are saying, you'll realize that, "Hey! This guy is not just an egomaniac. He isn't just preaching at us, he actually does want to make a difference." I think that a lot of people who are called on their shit should actually learn from that. They need to think to themselves, "What am I saying that is coming off preachy?" If you can't have a normal conversation with people, can't have a drink, talk about football, you're dead already. You're not getting through to anybody if all you have to say is, "Politics, politics, politics, blah, blah, blah." People are going to be so fucking bored of you. Revolutionaries and political people need to stop being so socially inept. Be normal for once in your life!

Do you think that's why people like Serj Tankian (System of a Down), Tom Morello (Rage Against the Machine) and the guys from Anti-Flag have such a backlash against them because it's so 'in-your-face' all the time?
Absolutely. We do it to ourselves. The message rings a lot more true when you can entertain people and come down to their level and not be this preachy "I'm better than you" dickhead. A lot of people can learn from that. They need to chill and get into football or get into something that's not political for once.

The album opens with a big heart on sleeve ballad, 'Walk Astray'. You said before that you tried to combine the politics and the personal aspects. This song was kind of like a "Where do I go from here?" type of song.
Yeah, I'd actually written the acoustic part a long time ago around the time where we were really feeling the crunch from Wind-Up and stuff like that. It was my own frustration with my personal life and with politics and everything. I was just sick to death of singing about it and nothing happening and talking about it and nothing happening. It was sort of bringing in a more personal side with what happened with 9/11 and stuff like that. What was going on with your life at the time? Make people think back through politics and emotional and personal and what was going on in their life. What do they want to see? What are their hopes and dreams? How frustrating it is to not have the chance to speak out about them and fully realize or actualize them. It's a frustrated little song.

Was this album about experimenting with different sounds and making a Boysetsfire album without musical barriers?
Absolutely. In the past, there were certain areas where we though we shouldn't do it because we cant play it live, or it sounds too much like this. On this album, any time anyone said we shouldn't do something, we still did it. If we ever asked, "Is this overdoing it?" We'd answer, "Yes it is, let's do it."

What are you hoping to achieve with your music?
Number one, people listen to it musically and they think it's original; it's something that moves them. Then, they delve into the lyrics and the meaning and the ambition behind it and they become inspired, depressed, angered and happy all at the same time. We'd love to encompass all emotions and we just want people to think it rocks.

boysetsfire.org

2006 "Misery Index: Notes From the Plague Years" (Equal Vision)
2005 "Before The Eulogy" (Equal Vision)
2003 "Tomorrow Come Today" (Wind-Up)
2002 "Live for Today" (Wind-Up)
2001 "After The Eulogy" (Wind-Up)
2000 "This Crying, This Screaming, My Voice Is Being Born" (Magic Bullet)
1998 "In Chrysalis" (Initial)
1997 "The Day The Sun Went Out" (Initial)

ULVER

by Barry Lee Dejasu

Once upon a time, there was a black metal band called Ulver. No, wait, they're an electronica group. No, they're a...a...say, just what kind of a band is Ulver, anyway?! Like a bored and impatient leg, Norway's Ulver have never been able to keep still in a world of all-too-frequently repetitive and unoriginal music.

Back in 1995, Ulver turned the heads of many a black metal fanatic with their debut, "Bergtatt". Sure, they used traditional black metal elements (sweeping guitar melodies, harsh screams, pummeling drums, foggy production), but they kept things fresh with more unusual styles – clean vocals and acoustic guitar passages, namely. Their sophomore effort, "Kveldssanger", was even more unusual – entirely acoustic, with much singing and chanting, it was more neo-classical Scandinavian folk than anything else. Then there was "Nattens Madrigal", revered by many as THE penultimate black metal album, with its ultra-callous production, buzzing guitar lines, nearly silent bass, and hoarse screams like dying winter spirits. Anyone could tell you - Ulver was by all means a black metal band, if an unusual one.

Then something called "Themes from William Blake's the Marriage of Heaven and Hell" came along in 1998. When people first popped this album into their players, the LAST thing they were expecting to hear was electronica. But surely enough, that's what they got – Ulver had completely revamped their sound into something wholly different. They stayed within this genre for subsequent releases – namely 2000's "Perdition City", various EPs, and a couple of film scores – but with their latest release, "Blood Inside", Ulver have re-created themselves, again, with a whole slew of different instruments and styles under their belts.

Founding vocalist/songwriter Krystoffer "Garm" Rygg took some time to share his thoughts on the album, the band, and other stuff.

Over the years, you've gone by several different names (Garm, of course, being the most famous), but also Trickster G., Christophorus, et cetera. Was there any particular reason for changing it?

Krystoffer Rygg: (laughs) I guess it's a way to kind of, ah... If I wanted to sidestep this question, I could blame it on multiple-personality disorder, but I don't really know. As a creative person I have this disposition to... you know, do paradoxical things, and sometimes I feel like a stranger to myself, my reflection, the way I come across or something. I guess a way to make a statement in that direction is to change your artist name. I don't have a clever answer to it. Maybe I hate myself. I don't think I've really used Garm myself for many years, but it seems that's how most people like to say my name. In fact it is my real middle name. What I have done is I have reduced it down to a single letter. The capital thing, which is kind of self-dissociating. Like X or Y. You know, you can call me what you want.

Well, I guess for this interview I'll just call you "Bob."

That's great. I'm gonna adopt that for the next record. Bob G. (laughs)

"Blood Inside" was the first full-length album you guys released in about five years. What was the cause for the time gap?

Well, things didn't stand still in-between; we did a lot of things... I did "The Sham Mirrors" with Arcturus, and after "Perdition City" we did at least two

EP's, three soundtracks for film/movies, there were some curator-duties for the 1st Decade in the Machines CD, and then we did another EP, the "A Quick Fix of Melancholy" thing, which was our way of trying to get back into writing songs, or something that resembled songs, and also find out where we wanted to take things. I think after all our work with film, which is very kind of... kind of aesthetically fixed we definitely needed to make a different kind of... Anyway, we ended up making "Blood Inside", so...yeah, a lot of things in between.

Speaking of those soundtracks, do you think you'll be doing more of those?
Probably. I mean, I'm not young with the bluest eyes anymore. I'm an old and pessimistic man (laughs). I'm concerned with money and stuff. Making soundtracks is a good way of doing that, making money, and still pretend that we are making art.

So was the shift from black metal to electronica a part of becoming an "old man?"
I probably thought so at the time. That we were becoming sophisticated or something, (laughs) I don't really think like that anymore. It probably had more to do with our rebellious impulses, I guess. I know it's childish, but we get kinda nauseous if we are with the in-crowd. We always escape it. I'll let you in on a little secret: I'm absolutely terrified of not being original. And with black metal, it was like, it suddenly became really popular and turned into this generic mess, you know. In the early days every single black metal band was supposed to have their own unique sound and vision, and, well, visions expand. It just sort of felt natural to proceed along the course of the other interests or influences we were developing at the time. Before "Perdition City", we were listening a lot to computer-based, beat-driven - but still highly atmospheric - music, like Autechre or Aphex Twin, and that album is certainly influenced a lot by those kinds of acts. "Blood Inside" is not really that much of an electronic album, but it utilizes a lot of the technology we learned from our electronica phase. It showed us a different way to make records while still following different musical perspectives. They changed all of mine. It's not just true for me, it's true for everyone.

It's a part of human nature.
Yeah, I guess it's the human condition, in some ways, there's no denying that. Some musicians stick to a formula. That works for some people, the whole "keep it real" thing. My main problem with that approach is that I don't believe anything is really real, so to speak.

With all the changes that came with "Blood Inside", do you think you'll be doing something similar next?
I don't think so, because there's always going to be a contraposition. "Blood Inside" is like a monster kaleidoscope of illusions, very neatly arranged. As it seems now, the next record is going to be without all that covering and more humble, with a more... what can I say, heartbreaking atmosphere. It's not going to be the same at all. We are kind of circular. It's reaction, anti-reaction, reaction, anti-reaction. It plays off each other, that's the way we work. We're not really good at perfecting a formula or sticking to what we know. We'd rather, how do you say, "take water over your head" we'd rather do that and drown. It's a matter of disposition, I guess.

How does Ulver go about writing songs?
There's really no-one with keen interests. All three of us are terrible at the people game. Generally, talking to people is not something we're good at. I mean, I'm not very good at it either, but I'm probably better than the other two, so, uh, what was the question again? Am I speaking in tongues?

You're doing okay.
Well, it's become my cross to bear to at least try to keep things visible, even though we certainly do fuck up a lot of opportunities, and miss out on a lot of PR and corporate-ass, so, yeah, we're really terrible at doing the whole business aspect of the music industry.

With that, how do you guys go about doing shows - or do you even do shows?
Nope, nope. No shows, nope.

Has Ulver ever performed?
Ah, yeah, but that was, what... twelve years ago? (laughs) It's been a while. We're, what can I say... hermetical about that stuff. I mean, at this point, it's turned into this thing, everybody keeps asking about it, so we have a lot of expectations to live up to. And that means work. We'd have to put a lot of time into it, take the whole repertoire, tell the story, you know. We'd never go out just to promote a single album or something like that. We've been talking about it lately, but you know, with us that's all it ever amounts to... talk, talk.

There was supposed to be an all-stringed instruments re-recording of "Nattens Madrigal". Was that still going to happen?
Yeah, we actually recorded those strings in 2001, right after "Perdition City" I think, and we've been working a bit on and off with it, but it remains a project we never brought to fruition. That's the way it is with us. Things take a lot of time, developing so slowly, and this project you just mentioned is sleeping at the moment. We have quite a few projects that need to be completed sooner or later, some warm and shiny day, if we live...

So you've recently collaborated with SunnO))) on their upcoming "WHITEbox" boxed set...
Yes, that's actually quite a while ago, it's supposed to come out in a real elaborate vinyl box, it should be right around the corner, but we did it back in 2004 or something. I don't remember too well what it sounds like, I haven't listened to it since we did it. Of course it's in SunnO))) style, but I no longer recall the details. I'm going to have to hear it with everybody else I guess.

Speaking of collaborations, you've also recently worked with Daniel Cardoso as Head Control System.
For me, an important point of HCS was to test how much of a professional singer I could be. As Ulver kept deviating to the left, people kept telling me I should use my voice more, so this was a good opportunity to sing without being difficult about it. Head Control System is Daniel's baby, and even though he and I see things very differently, it was no problem for me to adapt to his way of seeing things. I have a lot of respect for his talent. Besides, I instantly took a liking to his music. I love that kind of music, rock shit, even though it is awful direct to be part of my crooked world. (laughs)

Were there any other collaborations or side projects you or the other members plan on doing?
Well, I'm actually about to do something which I haven't started yet, I guess I can say it... Aethenor. It's a project involving Stephen (O'Malley) from SunnO))) actually, and Daniel (O'Sullivan) from Guapo and Miasma & the Carousel of Headless Horses. He's a Brit. With favorable leanings. I'll probably be working with them on some kind of chamber, ambient, open-mic kind of music, but it's not really done, so anything can happen. But as far as collaborations go, I think that is what's scheduled for the time being.

Was there anything else you'd like to add?
Well, hopefully you'll get something out of all that drooling.

jester-records.com/ulver/

2004 "Blood Inside" (The End)
2003 "Svidd Neger" soundtrack (Jester)
2003 "Teachings in Silence". (Jester)
2003 "A Quick Fix of Melancholy" EP (Jester)
2003 "Ulver 1993 – 2003: 1st Decade in the Machines" (Jester)
2002 "Lyckantropen Themes" soundtrack (Jester)
2001 "Silencing the Singing" EP (Jester)
2001 "Silence Teaches You How to Sing" EP (Jester)
2000 "Perdition City" (Jester)
1999 "Metamorphosis" EP (Jester)
1998 "Themes from William Blake's the Marriage of Heaven and Hell" (Jester)
1997 "Nattens Madrigal" (Century Black)
1996 "Kveldssanger" (Head Not Found)
1995 "Bergtatt" (Head Not Found)

Year Future

by Jeremiah Griffey

Year Future stands out as a bit of an anomaly in the L.A. punk scene. They're too old to be a part of The Smell scene. They're too stand-offish to be included in the Steve Aoki/Moving Units club scene, although they share a drummer with the Moving Units. They're definitely not accessible enough to be lumped into the hip Mars Volta category, although their vocalist, Sonny Kay, co-owns Gold Standard Labs with Omar Rodriguez-Lopez.

With their unique blend of political lyrics, bleeding vocals, goth guitars, tribal drumming and clean production, there is not an easy place to set them on the shelf within the genre library at all. If you played their new album, "First World Fever" (May 2, Gold Standard Labs), for a casual music fan they'd instantly peg them as a hardcore band. But that's too easy an assumption.

Perhaps their pedigree plays a role in the fact they're hard to pinpoint. Year Future's roster reads like a who's who of dudes who used to be in bands you've never heard, but should have. Kay used to scream for Angel Hair and The VSS, drummer Chris Hathwell tore it up with The Festival of Dead Deer before moving on to Moving Units, guitarist Rockey Crane used his ominous licks in Dead and Gone and Creeps on Candy, and bassist/producer Pete Lyman played in Living Science Foundation.

"I feel like we aren't personally committed or involved in any one of those small communities of people or activists enough to consider ourselves part of it," Kay said. "If anything, I think because of GSL we're lumped by default into this 'GSL scene,' whatever that is. I think we feel camaraderie with a lot of people. We feel like we have peers out there in the world of music. We've toured a lot and we've all been in a ton of bands. Amongst all of us, we know plenty of people and have a fabric of bands we're a part of. With regards to being an L.A.-based band, it's almost incidental that we're from here. Sometimes I'm reluctant to even classify us as an L.A.-based band, because it comes with so much baggage attached."

For the album, Year Future decided to a Dead Can Dance song, the Bowie-esque "Black Sun", utilizing the vocals of Marlaine Reiner of L.A.'s This Blush. Though Kay isn't the biggest fan of Dead Can Dance, he said his band could have penned the song themselves.

"Musically I like it more than the majority of their stuff," Kay said. "The message of the song always resonated with me. I don't know enough about them or their other material to say with certainty, but from what I know about them, that's their only song that seems to be about the subject matter it deals with, the apocalyptical, human condition kinda thing."

Kay and Crane each grew up listening to pre-goth bands like Bauhaus, and feel comfortable with the way they reference the music they love, without becoming some cheesy goth band. They accomplish the feat by channeling their darker tendencies through punk and hardcore in order to get the word out about bands they cherished when they were younger.

"In a way, covering Dead Can Dance was "like footnoting what we're doing now with stuff that's still really valid and near and dear to us that may be completely unknown to kids who hear our band," Kay said. "It's funny. I just pretty much had this same conversation over lunch with somebody. I'm sure there are [bands merging pre-goth music with hardcore, minus any semblance of cheese], but I don't know who they are. Even bands that GSL has put out like The Vanishing or Veronica Lipgloss & The Evil Eyes, that are coherent and reference similar time periods in their own way. We've been pretty reluctant to go the keyboard route, because it has become such a cliché. So many people equate keyboards to new wave."

"First World Fever" debuts the "new" Year Future. Kay and Crane released two EPs with Sam Ott and Jim Anderson. This incarnation creates the music Kay envisioned when he started the band. For album art, Kay, who doubles as a graphic designer, pieced together a creepy, U.S. dollar-bill-based, conspiracy-theory-driven collection of faces from worldwide currency for the package.

"Money's the most literally and figuratively accessible reference point for all people in the world," Kay said. "I thought it was an interesting prospect to package the record as if it was not really money, but to suggest the idea of money being universal, though the foundation for it is a one dollar bill. I didn't want to directly suggest that it's explicitly an attack on American ideas about capitalism or anything like that. I wanted it to suggest more of a global theme to it, something that relates to people of different social strata."

Kay will also launch a new website for the band that he hopes will help articulate the meaning of his complex design, which includes, oddly, the Pillsbury Dough Boy in the center of the Pentagon. He stopped short of saying the band was an overtly political band, just that his lyrics are.

"I'm not suggesting that everyone in the band wakes up in the morning thinking about conspiracy theories," Kay said. "However, I speak for the whole band when I say that the band represents an idea bigger than 'We're four guys playing music together.' I'm not at all attempting to put words in anybody's mouth or suggest that there's a unified cause to

guaranteed missile free nights

what we're doing. I know pretty confidently that everybody in the band would be doing this regardless of the subject matter of the songs."

Coupled with his design is the song "Monday," a sort of classic punk anti 9 to 5 workweek call to arms reminding people an entire life flies by while they're stuck in an office waiting for the weekend. Although, admittedly, Kay is one of the lucky ones who can make a living, albeit modest off the music business through his record label.

"My career revolves around people's music and making it available to people. I feel like there's so much stuff out there, so much stuff coming at people all the time that people have been kinda bombarded with media and advertising, music and movies. Largely, the vast majority of it is filler. Because I am actively working all the time to expose new bands and touch upon new ideas in music and maintain this culture, which is really what it is. I don't know how else to frame it, I feel like my own contribution needs to be that much more worthwhile."

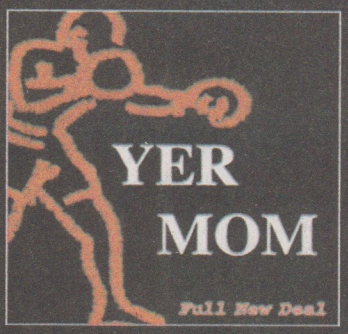
"Vehicular Baptism" is perhaps the album's most poignant track, though there are many moments of political intrigue. Kay rails against "consumer narcissism:" "Divine right to buy / The divine right to drive / Our American rights / To memory selective elective / & guaranteed missile free nights / So I slapped a magnet made in China on the back of my commitment to Iraq." Despite his bitter, often cryptic lyrics, Kay doesn't spend his day ruminating at the GSL offices, penning his every thought.

"I don't spend my time writing lyrics," Kay said. "I don't write music. I don't play music. I can't play an instrument. Let's put this in terms of Omar. I mean, sometimes it's hard to talk to Omar because he won't put a guitar down. He wakes up in the morning, puts on his guitar and is playing the guitar all the time. I know whether he was in a band, or on tour, or in the studio, or not, he would still be playing the guitar all the time. It's inherent to who he is as a person. I'm not like that, and I'm certainly not like that when it comes to writing and blueprinting what my role is in the band. For me, I approach each record or band as a project with an established goal in mind ahead of time, and tackle it that way as opposed to something that's just a given in my life."

yearfuture.net

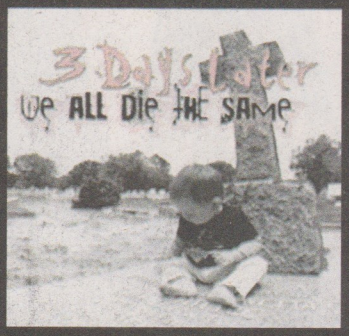
2006 "First World Fever" (Gold Standard Labs)
2004 "The Hidden Hand EP" (Gold Standard Labs)
2003 "Year Future" (Gold Standard Labs)

Punk Rock * Punk Rock * Punk Rock



Yer Mom

"Full New Deal"



3 Days Later

"We All Die The Same"

The Yucks

"Self Titled Debut"

The Downtown Strutters

"You Get What You Pay For"

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Photo: Austin Young

Margaret Cho

by Gordon Downs

Margaret Cho is without a doubt one of the most controversial female comics in the history of entertainment. Her ability to comment on a wide range of subject matter has led to both critical acclaim and political debasing. Outspoken with her views on sexuality, race and the social consciousness of America, Cho was the first Asian American to land her own sitcom, *All America Girl* in 1994 on the fledgling ABC network. Her 2001 concert film *I'm The One That I Want* broke records as it grossed 1.4 million dollars with only nine reels of the film in circulation. Her most recent release, "Assassin" covers all the bases as Cho comments on a variety of subjects from the right wing republicans to the unfortunate spectacle that became Terry Schiavo.

Margaret Cho speaks after a recent vacation in India.

What were you doing in India?
Margaret Cho: It was sort of like a vacation and then it turned into missionary work. It's so terrible, the poverty over there, it's incomprehensible. It's not just a few people, it's this huge amount of people that have been homeless for generations, it's just sickening. So I ended up giving a lot of my money to kids. It's a beautiful, beautiful country with plenty of beautiful things to see. It's beautiful and also terrible. I love the art and I love the music and I love the dancing, that's like my other job, I'm a belly dancer.

Where did you learn how to belly dance?
I go to Egypt once a year and I study there, and I wanted to go to India to really get into what the music and culture there, and I just got really side tracked by the poverty and the awfulness of it. But I think it's good to see things like that when you're really in a privileged place living in America, and you don't see all the things you have going for you.

That is enlightening. I didn't know you were a belly dancer?
Yes I am a belly dancer. It's a great, great thing and I really enjoy it.

Is it kind of like a Billy Blanks workout?
Yes, it's a very good workout. It's also a very spiritual thing as well. I have a great deal of fun inside the belly dance community. I have a lot of friends who are dancers. It's a great thing for women who are getting older and who want to feel vital and sexy and to be able to dance, it's just a tremendous thing. I have teachers that are well into their seventies who are very, very fit and they feel great about themselves. We don't have that kind of culture here for women on this country.

How did you go about from being a stand up comedian to a gay icon?
It was a very gradual thing, because I played a lot of gay clubs coming up. So that was part of it, and also doing a lot of different stuff in the gay community also, that helps. It's very exciting and very cool. It's a special kind of identity and it's some thing I really treasure.

Would you say that your comedy is pandering to a specific audience?
Why not? I mean, that's what comedy is, pandering to whatever audience, so it doesn't really matter.

Did you watch *Brokeback Mountain* yet?
I haven't seen it, and I really want to but I've been out of the country. They're not playing that in Delhi or anywhere in India, unfortunately. I saw a trailer for it and they were booing the film, and it was so depressing that they were booing it. I think it's great. I think it's such a cool thing that this movie is out and it's so controversial. I would love to see more of this. We don't have enough queer films and the ones that we do have aren't to the scope of this huge budget movie.

Do you think there are lots of gay cowboys in Wyoming?
Well it's possible, but it doesn't really matter if there are or of there aren't. What we're talking about is romance and having the freedom to go into a romantic film and have that experience and not personally identify – like, you don't have to be gay to enjoy it. It's just a romance and all people understand romance and we shouldn't have to have those ideas of gender to be in the way of that.

Do you have to wear a disguise when you go out to the cinema? Do people accost you on the street?
Oh no never. It's not like that. It's totally not like that.

Have you ever toured with bands before?
I have in the past. It's not as frequent because it's really hard. I did tour with Ani Difranco, briefly. We did a co-headlining thing where we went back and forth. She's great. I've also done shows with Le Tigre and Bob Mould. Certain comedians are definitely more 'rock' than others.

What are you currently listening to these days?
Right now I've changed all my musical tastes so I'm really into very much like Middle Eastern music, Egyptian music, Indian music, things that are not so mainstream at all. It's all about dance. So my musical tastes sort of shifted, somebody that I like a lot right now are the Dresden Dolls, they're great. They're so awesome.

What are you doing the rest of the day?
I have another thing at eleven. And then I have to go to some office thing, and then a bunch of little things.

You think you might have time to catch a matinee showing of *Brokeback Mountain*?
I don't know? It's a possibility. I think it might be *King Kong* again. I love that movie.

You're gonna see *King Kong* again?
Yeah I love that movie, it's so good. I cried and cried.

Does Margaret Cho have a message for the children?
Be happy. Because it's a happy life, it's happy times. You should be happy.

margaretcho.com

2005 "Assassin" (Nettwerk)
2003 "Revolution" (Nettwerk)
2002 "Notorious C.H.O" (Nettwerk)
2001 "I'm The One That I Want" (Self-Released)
1996 "Drunk With Power" (Nettwerk)

That's like my other job, I'm a belly dancer.

...don't get high, and don't be a shitty person.

by Gordon Downs

On Wednesday nights for the past four years in New York City, a small bar and performance space called Rififi's has been home to perhaps the funniest comedy show in America. Dubbed, "Invite Them Up" by creators and hosts Eugene Mirman and Bobby Tisdale, the show is a hodgepodge of stand up comedy and music. Past performers have included David Cross, Jessi Klein, Todd Barry and Aziz Ansari. Local musical acts like Langhorne Slim and Yo La Tengo usually close out every show with a few songs. Comedy Central Records recently released a three CD/DVD compilation featuring some of the highlights from previous shows.

Co-host Eugene Mirman answers a few questions about Invite Them Up, and find out what the difference is between comedy clubs and rock clubs.

How long have you been doing stand up comedy?
Eugene Mirman: I've done this around ten years or so. More or less effectively on when you start counting. I started in college, so I kind of did random open mics around the area I went to school, and I also started a show on campus that I would do. I'd have talent shows and stuff. I wasn't really part of stand up comedy at the very beginning, because I was just in school and nobody else did stand up. Then when I moved to Boston, I started doing stuff at the Comedy Studio, which is on the third floor of a Chinese restaurant in Cambridge. That's where I really started doing comedy. Brendan Smalls, he used to have that animated show "Home Movies", him and I would do stand up there. We used to be roommates.

It seems like it's been fairly easy for you to network and start shows wherever you go?
Well no. It's a great deal of work and it took years. When I would start something, sometimes it would work, sometimes it wouldn't. I would send press releases, I would flyer, I did tons of stuff. I just did it for my own events and not for something else. I would go to random shows to try to find other people who I thought were funny who were doing some kind of comedy. I didn't have a community in Boston at first, so we all kind of found each other. I went out of my way to try and find things and start things, and the same thing like here in New York.

What's the difference between doing stand up comedy at a music venue as opposed to a comedy club?
In general when I do tours, I play mostly rock clubs. You get more money and it's just much easier draw in people who want to see you, and it's much cheaper for people to go. Some comedy clubs I'm sure are very nice. I don't know how to express it? You know what it is? Nobody ever goes to just see 'music'. If somebody was like, "Hey! I'm going to see music. You wanna come?" Like that's a weird thing to say, because there's so many types of music, and I think the same thing is true about comedy. So there's something about comedy clubs where they vaguely try to appeal so broadly.

How did you meet Mr. Bobby Tisdale?
A lot of people knew each other from comedy. Basically, I started doing this show at Rififi's where the Invite Them Up happens, and it was a lot of work and sometimes there would be audiences and sometimes there would be like 10 people. Eventually, Rififi's changed from a café and film place to a bar and performance place. They had offered Bobby a show and I said, "Why don't we just work on this together?" Because it's hard to make a show work. But I had done shows with him in general and we're friends and we have a lot of the same friends. I mean you sort of fall into circles of people that you like.

And how did Comedy Central come about releasing this as a CD/DVD compilation?
I wanted to do an album, so Bobby and I booked three nights to record. Then I was just going to look for a label, but then I thought, there's so many people involved, it'd be much easier to release this with someone bigger. So we called Comedy Central and we met, and it was like, "Let's do this."

The Fuggedabuddies clip on the DVD is hilarious! How often have they played Invite Them Up?
They do lot's of different bits together. On occasion it's The Fuggedabuddies, though they haven't done that in awhile.

What can you tell me about your upcoming Sub Pop album?
I was going to do a CD and DVD, but it occurred to me that I wanted to do another CD and that I wanted to do them together. I asked Dave from Suicide Squeeze if he didn't mind, just because Sub Pop has a much bigger distribution. It'll be easier to find and my first album hasn't totally recouped yet. I've known the Sub Pop people for a few years, I met them though David Cross. At some point when it occurred to me, I asked them if they'd be interested, and I think they met for awhile and like a month later they said yes.

Does Eugene Mirman have a message for the children?
Watch out for danger. Don't get too high, well like a little, maybe. No, don't get high, and don't be a shitty person.

eugenemirman.com

2005 "Invite Them Up" (Comedy Central)
2004 "The Absurd Nightclub Comedy of. . ." (Suicide Squeeze)

The Metaphysics of Fuggedaboutit

by Gordon Downs

Jon Benjamin and Jon Glaser are comedy writers and performers operating out of New York City. Existing slightly below the radar of mainstream America, both Benjamin and Glaser are perhaps two of the funniest people that you've never heard of. Benjamin is an accomplished writer for various projects that shall go unnamed, though most fans would recognize his voice as that of Coach McGuirk, the booze hound, highland dancer in the short lived Adult Swim series *Home Movies*. Glaser was a writer for Late Nite with Conan O'Brien, and will often pop in to do the occasional sketch now and then. Though again, fans of Adult Swim programming would most likely notice Glaser's voice as that of Stroker, from Adult Swim's buddy cop animated series, *Stroker and Hoop*.

While stand up comedy isn't necessarily their bread and butter, they do enjoy performing various bits at local shows around New York, including a show they co-host once a month in New York called Midnight Pajama Jam. For fans, a live DVD taping of Midnight Pajama Jam is currently in post production and should see the light of day sometime later this year. Until then however, you can catch both Benjamin and Glaser on Comedy Central's recent CD/DVD compilation, "Invite Them Up." Both performers appear on audio tracks, as well as a stand out performance on the DVD as a couple of San Diego transplants that think they're from New Jersey.

Dubbed 'The Fuggedabuddies', I was able to catch up with both Benjamin and Glaser on a brisk New York Saturday night in hopes of finding out what exactly an Aliyah is?

So what are you guys doing tonight?
Jon Benjamin: I've gotta get cracking on dinner, Glaser's probably going to the Rolling Stones concert or some reunion? Somebody was telling me that the roadies from the stones have a band that was playing the other night. Like the literal roadies that have been with the stones for years, who are also now old and have their own band, and have been playing out as the roadies from the Rolling Stones.
Jon Glaser: I heard that they're better than the stones.
Benjamin: That's the name of the band; it's called The Roadies from the Stones.
Glaser: I'm not going to the Rolling Stones concert tonight. I'm just scooping the litter box.

What's your cat's name?
Glaser: Two Cats. I'm not going to put their names in print. Let's not do that to them.
Benjamin : They're not going to read it. What, are you going to show it to them and point out their names? "There's your name in print."

There's one topic I'd like to cover and that's Yiddish and the Jewish culture, I'm actually considering converting from Catholicism.
Benjamin: Don't do it.

Don't do it?
Benjamin: I think officially we could do it, Jon and I can do it.
Glaser: We can do it over the phone.
Benjamin: We've been sanctioned by Judaism to convert people. I can bring you to the chosen.

Right now I'm heavy goyum.
Benjamin: I didn't know there was a heavy goyum? Is it like a cream goyum?

Something you did reference during the Fuggedabuddies bit on the "Invite Them Up" DVD, was making an Aliyah. What exactly is an Aliyah?

Glaser: I'm not a hundred percent sure, but. . .
Benjamin: I think you make Aliyah, I believe? Did you say Aliyah?
Glaser: I thought it was pronounced "A-Li-A."
Benjamin: I think it's A-Lee-Ya, which is return to the homeland. That's when all the Jews that are spread out around the world, because they've been displaced from the homeland, then they return. That's making Aliyah.

Together you guys host a comedy show in NYC called Midnight Pajama Jam.
Benjamin: It's kind of hard to explain.
Glaser: I feel like when you explain it, it's like the worst show you'd never want to see. Essentially, it's a fake talk show and the sidekicks are puppets. If I had a friend who said, "Hey come see our show, it's like a fake talk show and the sidekicks are these two puppets." I'd never go see that show.
Benjamin: The thing with Jon is, he's not really a puppeteer, per say, although he's become quite good.
Glaser: Pretty good.
Benjamin: He just sort of sits in a chair and holds the puppets up, it's very deconstructed. I'm the host.

Do you guys have guests?
Benjamin: Mostly comedians that we know come out as guests. They won't do their act or their routine, they'll either do something that Jon and I have come up with or a character that they bring that we just sorta interview.

Could you ever see Midnight Pajama Jam as something you could take on the road?
Benjamin: We taped the show for a DVD, which is probably the easiest way to get this out for people to see it. Just because of the nature of the show, it's usually Jon and I and three other people. That's kind of a hard thing to tour with, because there's a lot of comedians and they're usually busy or we're busy. The DVD will come out hopefully soon, and that way people will get a chance to see it.

So how often do you guys go out and do stand up in NYC?
Glaser: Every now and then, it's pretty infrequent. It's pretty random. I don't really go out and do stand up per say at clubs. I would just say every now and then on occasion.
Benjamin: I'll do shows mostly in New York whenever they come up. But like Jon, I don't do stand up really. There are only a few places like "Invite Them Up", and there are other similar shows like that where you can go up and perform not just straight stand up. It's the same with Jon and I, mostly we perform not the Fuggedabuddies. When the DVD comes out, I hope we can tour, but Jon's having a baby and the DVD's coming out right around that time. We'll hopefully bring the show selectively around the country somehow.

So when will fans be able to see The Fuggedabuddies again?
Benjamin: We'll definitely do a Fuggedabuddies movie. "The Fuggedabuddies come home to San Diego." I've never been to San Diego. Have you Jon?
Glaser: I don't think I've ever been to San Diego.

You guys have never made it out to the Comic Con?
Benjamin: I've been invited, I was supposed to go last year and the year before that, but something else always comes up. Brendon, the creator of "Home Movies" went last year.
Glaser: The Stroker and Hoop writers had mentioned that thing.

I heard someone dissed the show at last years Q & A during the Adult Swim panel discussion?
Benjamin: The gauntlet has been thrown.
Glaser: That's hilarious. It could've been a plant from Adult Swim just to generate excitement.
Benjamin: You never know with them, they're very crafty.

You've both performed with Yo La Tengo during their annual Hanukkah eight night stand at Maxwell's in New Jersey. How are those shows when it comes to mixing comedy and rock music?
Benjamin: Those are great. We played two shows this year.
Glaser: That's where The Fuggedabuddies originated.
Benjamin: That's true.
Glaser: It's been a year right?
Benjamin: I think so, it was. . .
Glaser: 2004.
Benjamin: Yeah, it was last year at those Hanukkah shows that we did The Fuggedabuddies. I think it was just based on saying, "Fuggedaboutit" on the way there because we couldn't get a parking space. We were in the car with our friend Dave, who sells t-shirts for Yo La Tengo, driving in from Manhattan and we were trying to find a space and because we were in Jersey we kept saying, "Fuggedaboutit. We'll never get a parking space, fuggedaboutit." Then we went and did it. We just did The Fuggedabuddies based on that.

Is it a key element for you guys to wear matching hats?
Benjamin: We do a lot of matching hat stuff. It works.
Glaser: We did matching hats awhile ago and it worked. What hats are we wearing on the DVD?

Those hats say "USA".
Glaser: Oh yeah I forgot about those. I dunno? I forgot I wore my USA hat that night. I enjoyed the "#1 Dude" that Benjamin had penciled onto his hat.

I thought that said "#1 Dad".
Benjamin: That would have been better.
Glaser: I wish it had been "#1 Dad".
Benjamin: Because America is the world's Dad.

When did you guys first meet up?
Benjamin: We met in Los Angeles, like most of the great duos, at the Jenny McCarthy show. She had a sketch comedy show we both wrote for.

Her show on MTV?
Glaser: Did you just look that up on your computer?

No, I actually remember that show.
Glaser: Oh really? Yeah it was on MTV, it was 1997.
Benjamin: You'd be surprised what we do. It gets very dark.
Glaser: It's not all Conan and McGuirk.

What do you enjoy more, the writing or the performing?
Benjamin: I've always performed more than I've written.
Glaser: I like both. I'm up for either as long as it's preferably a fun project.

What do you guys have planned next as a duo?
Benjamin: We'll probably do more it's just hard to say what.
Glaser: Something called 'The Brothers Italiano'.
Benjamin: Yeah keep an eye out for that. That's the new Fuggedabuddies.

Is it a similar routine?
Benjamin: They're all really similar.
Glaser: Very similar cadences, very similar meandering style.
Benjamin: We try and perfect the accent based on the character right? We have an Italian accent for that?
Glaser: Yeah, sort of.

The Fuggedabuddies do have a really unique and laid back cadence, what's that attributed to?
Benjamin: I think the general rule that Jon and I have when we're performing is we're not prepared. Which is totally true, I'm not kidding. We don't really prepare much. We do buy hats, and stuff like that. But as far as what we're gonna say and what we're gonna do there's not a lot of preparation.
Glaser: We kind of go by the creed of, "Don't prepare, Don't care".

Both of you come across with a fairly laconic stage presence.
Benjamin: Like Dane Cook. We gotta learn how to be more like Dane Cook.
Glaser: Gotta get on the Dane Train.
Benjamin: We'll go to Dane school.
Glaser: Dane Cook-iveristy.

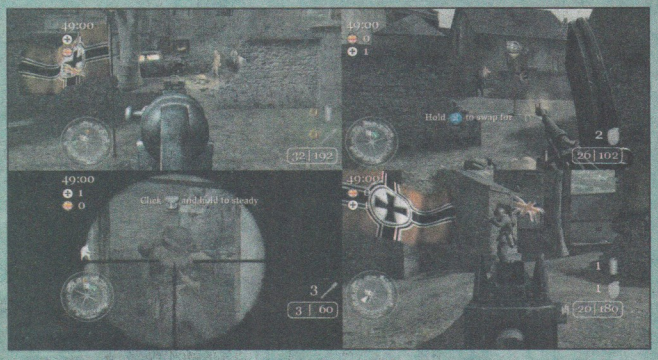
Did you know that guy is straight edge? His body is a temple.
Benjamin: Just look out the window and enjoy.

Do you have a message for the children?
Benjamin: Sleep tight.
Glaser: Don't let the bed bugs bite.

midnightpajamajam.com

Jon 'Stroker' Glaser

Jon 'Coach McGuirk' Benjamin



Call of Duty 2 is my first experience with FPS's on the Xbox 360, and damn, for a first generation game on this new console, it's really fucking beautiful. Unless you've spent over a grand on a PC in the last six months, these graphics look better than anything else you're playing on. The game itself is classic *Call of Duty*-style play, with single and multi-player missions set in the more famous WWII-era settings. Whether its Africa or Germany, Egypt or Russia, the environments are plentiful and great looking. Game AI fluxuates from typical to infuriating; especially amazing is the computers ability to target grenades to land between your feet. Where the game really excels is the multiplayer, especially if you have four controllers and a big screen. When you have this setup, expect trouble getting rid of your friends. This has to be the funest multiplayer since *Golden Eye* on the Nintendo 64. With a decent single player and the most excellent multiplayer (a bit laggy online, but still worthy) *Call of Duty 2* is a must buy. **PR**

CALL OF DUTY 2

Platform: Xbox 360
Developer: Infinity Ward
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1-4 + online
Web: activision.com

Platform: PC
Developer: Digital Allusions
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1 + online
Web: battlefield2specialforces.ea.com

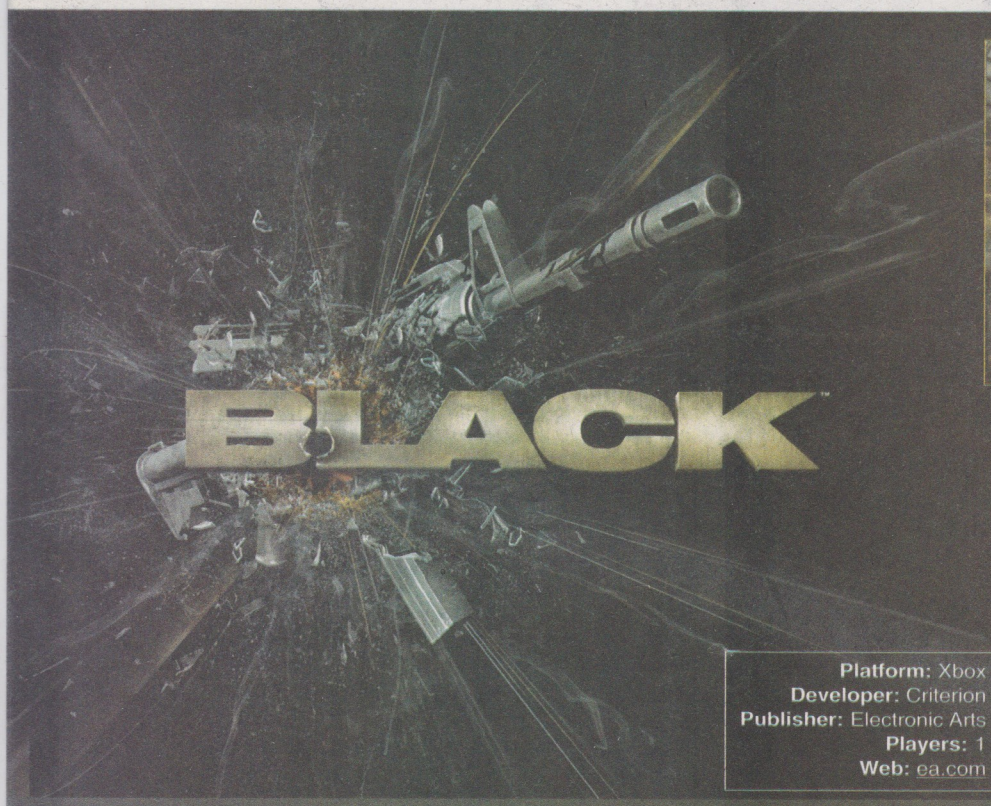
When *Battlefield 1942* made it's debut a few years back, the game blew everyone away, both in graphics and gameplay. *Battlefield: Vietnam* came after, and while it was decent, failed to spark much interest. *Battlefield 2* was a complete upgrade to the graphics engine, and unlike it's predecessor *BF1942*, had much more fluid multiplayer, because that's really what all the *Battlefield* games are about. Online multiplayer, up to 64 people (32 per team) fight to the death, trying to take over the enemies bases and hold them long enough until the round is over. *Battlefield 2* brought the online fighting to modern times, with Apache Helicopters, Humvee's and advanced weaponry along with a completely new and great feature, squads. You can team with up to five others, carrying out your own missions via commands from your squad leader, or your teams commander. So what's *Special Forces*? Basically an expansion to *BF2*. New are a half dozen maps, weapons (like gas grenades, zip lines, grappling hooks, flash bombs, etc) and vehicles. While it doesn't sound like much in the bang-for-buck, the new maps are all very fun, especially the ones set at night, when nightvision becomes mandatory.

Like all the games in the *Battlefield* series, this game is a HUGE resource hog. Don't even bother to play if your videocard is over 2-3 years old, you won't be able to, or you might, but the laggy gameplay will get too frustrating. However, if your PC can handle it, *Special Forces* is currently the best PC online FPS right now, period. Better than *Counter-Strike*, *Day of Defeat* or anything else. If you've got the hardware, you will not be disappointed... period. **PR**

Platform: PS2
Developer: Konami
Publisher: Konami
Players: 1
Web: konami.com

Suikoden V
幻想水滸伝

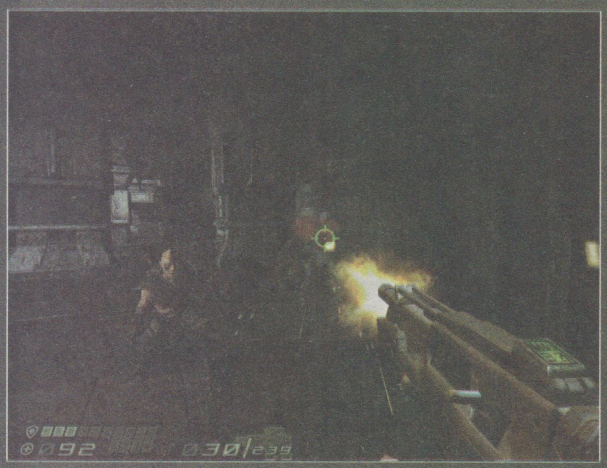
Suikoden V is another entry into the already crowed Playstation 2 RPG section. Well, it's not THAT crowded, but with goliath's like the *Final Fantasy* series and *Kingdom Hearts*, it's difficult to see what's left. *Suikoden* is already a popular RPG series in Japan, so it's only fit that it debuts here in the states (and on the PSP). Unfortunately, only the most hardcore of RPG lovers will enjoy this due to the games slowness, both in action and load times. While the in-depth story and the graphics help stave off boredom, this is truly a title for the more dedicated RPG gamers. **PR**



Platform: Xbox
Developer: Criterion
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Players: 1
Web: ea.com

For FPS and Black Op-type games, this is your candy, your treat for sweating out those difficult games. *BLACK* is probably one of the most straight up fun, best looking Xbox games I've played in a while. There is little story... you are Keller, member of the elite and highly classified *BLACK* military force. From there, it's pretty much just blowing the shit out of everything, in an explosive, *Rambo* meets *Commando* way. Trucks explode in huge, gorgeous fireballs (especially in HDTV). Windows shatter, bullets zing by your head as you run around like it's *Quake*... and thankfully, dead enemies leave enough ammo so you can pretty much never let up on the trigger. There isn't that much else to this game, so if you're looking for the *Burnout* of FPS's, look no further. **PR**

QUAKE 4

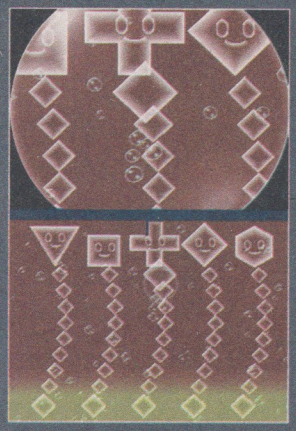


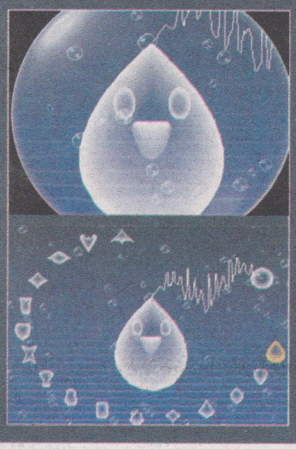
As of late, the Quake series have gone from crazy single player action to insane, massive multiplayer arenas. So after only an hour or two with Quake 4, I was surprised to see a much more complicated (at least for Quake standards) single player story line. The game starts off feeling a bit Halo-ish, with you and a batch of other soldiers fighting the Strogg aliens on their own planet, Stroggos. Advanced single player options not before seen in any Quake title go from squad tactics and teamwork to multiple level objectives aligned with a linear story path. And your computer buddies actually hold their own, which is nice for a change. That aside, it's a FPS, and doesn't take that many gaming sessions to finish the single player game. Multiplayer is as expected, but with smaller teams per side. Overall, this is pretty damn alright. **PR**

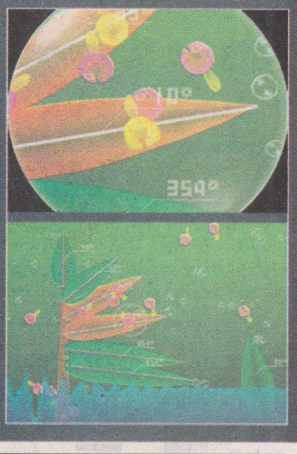
Platform: PC (Xbox360)
Developer: Raven / iD
Publisher: Activision
Players: 1 + online
Web: quake4game.com

ELECTROPLANKTON

Platform: Nintendo DS
Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo
Players: 1
Web: nintendo.com







Nintendo is on a mission to bring video games to the masses with their DS system, and with *Elektroplankton* comes their most original title in years. Created by multimedia artist Toshio Iwai, *Elektroplankton* isn't so much a "game" as it is a piece of interactive art, and is only available through the online store at nintendo.com, and at select retailers. Using the touch screen and stylus, the player manipulates beautifully rendered abstract plankton-like characters in order to create a wide variety of sounds, through ten different play modes. They range from simple bell-like tones to synthesized strings, to full-on voice samples coming from the DS's built-in mic combined with a variety of beats. There is even a mode for manipulating classic NES sounds to a set rhythm for the old-school gamers out there.

Now, if you are an avid gamer, this title is probably not for you, as it has no set goals, no score to keep, and ultimately very little to actually define it as a video game. The lack of a save feature for your creations is also a major bummer for the more musically inclined, though it is possible to run audio output from the DS to a computer or tape player to record live. Still, this is a title that begs to be seen and played, if for nothing else than to show what is possible in the video game medium.

Jesse Mann

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BEING A ROCK-STAR WASN'T COOL ENOUGH

So Johnny Temple started the hippest publishing company around.

by Eric Obenauf

After touring four continents and playing with the likes of Jesus Lizard, Rage Against the Machine, and Garbage, Johnny Temple of Girls Against Boys…

(a) Developed his own reality show, co-starring Flava Flav.
(b) Moved to Sweden and wrote songs for Justin Timberlake.
(c) Founded a book publishing company.

The correct answer, of course, is he founded Akashic Books.
All the other rockstars made fun of him and stole his lunch money.

Seriously.

"Are you in Girls Against Boys?" was one of the first questions author Marlon James had for his eventual publisher.

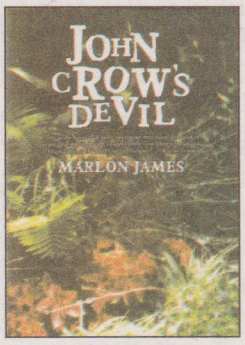
"I didn't even know anyone in Jamaica had heard of Girls Against Boys," says Temple.

Not only have people in Jamaica heard of the influential indie band, but they are also familiar with Akashic Books, an independent company based out of Brooklyn that Temple initially conceived with two friends to serve as a record label. It is one of the biggest publishers on the island nation. Apart from James, Akashic will feature a collection of writings from Jamaica's Calabash Workshop entitled "Iron Balloons", edited by Jamaican-American, Colin Channer.

Named after the secret Akashic Files, the company began its successful literary run in 1997, when it published *The Fuck-Up* by Arthur Nersesian, a modern classic that has gone on to sell nearly 100,000 copies (although, with Dell Pocket Books – Akashic, being a first-time publisher, managed to get the book through three printings).

Temple has received the Miriam Bass Award for Creativity in Publishing. While the books he has published have won, or been finalists for the Lambda Literary, Shamus, Anthony, and Edgar Awards, and been selected as Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers series and BookSense 76 picks. This, in under a decade's time.

Maybe the punk fan inside author Marlon James got the better of him, but probably not. He elected to publish his book, John Crow's Devil, with Akashic. The Jamaican author's debut has been lauded by the usual suspects of book reviewers, including the New York Times, which selected the novel as an Editor's Choice.



Maybe it was the prospect of having a say over the cover design that swayed James. Temple insists that he is "uncomfortable with a book going to press without author approval," which is an artist-oriented approach that was influenced by his days playing for a band signed to in indie label. "We're very punk inspired, very influenced by Dischord Records," says Temple.

Having previous experience in graphic with the Sean Paul (a childhood friend) album cover for "Dutty Rock", James designed the cover for *John Crow's Devil*. While a poster of the reggae-popstar might be commonplace in a middle school girl's bedroom, a signed, framed copy of "Dutty Rock" is the only incongruity in the Akashic office.

Akashic does publish more than Jamaican fiction. Further evidence of the punk ideology can be found in the community-spirited books Akashic publishes under their RDV imprint, edited by Robert Greenwald and Victor and Danny Goldberg. The other imprints they host include Punk Planet Books, which released the altogether superb novel *Hairstyles of the Damned* by Joe Meno in 2004, and Little House on the Bowery, which is a quirky, sometimes-disturbing series curated by cult-novelist Dennis Cooper.

Similarly, when Dennis Cooper first met Temple he asked when the latest New Wet Kojak album would be out. (NWK is a band featuring members of GirlsAgainstBoys. - ed.)

You're in a band signed to a major label, why start a book publishing company? What happened to the arena tour, adding a keyboardist, and hosting your own FM radio show?
I feel totally satiated. Akashic swallows so much of my creative energies.

How about the common perception in popular society that the novel, and literature are dying a slow and painful death?
From my own personal perspective, literature is not dying. It's bursting.

Believe it or not, there is evidence to support this claim. Spanish-language editions of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's most recent novella, *A Memoir of My Sad Whores*, sold more than 400,000 copies the first week it was in release. Put into context, that is roughly 150,000 MORE than Britney Spears' latest album sold in its first week, both debuting in November 2004. And to think, the mustachioed Colombian never had to sport a thong or dance with a snake to pull it off.

"It's understandable why literature doesn't fit in with pop culture," says Temple. And what literature is able to transcend that barrier, Temple sees as reason to be optimistic. "Kids reading 700 page books, its amazing!"

That 700 page book is, of course, Harry Potter.

While previous bestseller lists would have been reserved for Jose Canseco gossip memoirs, the sportstar's wife's gossip memoir, and John Grisham, independent publishers are beginning to make a larger splash in the publishing pond. This past year, subversive indie press Seven Stories breached the New York Times top ten with *A Man Without A Country*, by Kurt Vonnegut. Akashic released *Southland*, by Nina Revoyr, a poignant story of race and family, and the best book this reader has consumed in recent memory, and it cracked the Los Angeles Times bestseller list. A welcome difference to the days when Akashic opened its doors, and over 80% of book sales in the United States consisted of only five major publishers.

With a handful of other exciting presses, Akashic is breathing new life into what had become a rather stale, recycled industry. They give you reason to go to the corner bookstore and surf the spines, not for author names or titles, but for the Akashic colophon.

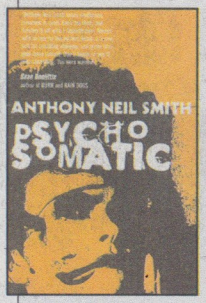
Dissimilar to a box of chocolates, you always know what you're going to get: a fucking amazing read.

akashicbooks.com

Books from Akashic to read ASAP, if you haven't already:

Southland by Nina Revoyr
Hairstyles of the Damned by Joe Meno
Manhattan Loverboy by Arthur Nersesian
John Crow's Devil by Marlon James
Adios Muchachos by Daniel Chavarria

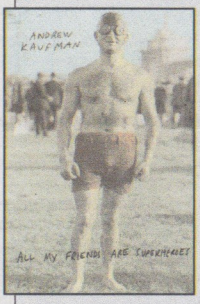
Anthony Neil Smith
Psychosomatic
(Point Blank)



There's blood on every page. Unlike Hollywood's take on crime, there is an underlying sense of reality. Maybe it's the chubby protagonist playing a wise-guy. Maybe it's the wheelchair-bound vixen without arm's or legs. The character's personalities prove more engaging than a jacked Schwarzenegger posing as a middle class banker pushed to the edge. And, perhaps, this rationalizes the violence that ensues as being more than shock value. Beneath the gore of Psychosomatic is a writer whose display of violence could be a ticker-tape of the absurdity that is the five o'clock news.

Eric Obenauf

Andrew Kaufman
All My Friends Are Superheros
(Coach House Press)



A tender, unique love story that is much deeper than the book's 106 pages. The book follows Tom, whose friendships and loves with superheroes make him stand out as simple. Still, Tom is able to woo the Perfectionist, but on their wedding night, her spiteful ex-boyfriend, Hypno, using his superpowers, convinces the Perfectionist that Tom is invisible. The book is phenomenal, using tones of magical realism to display a much larger truth to everyday heartbreak, anxiety, and love.

chbooks.com

Eric Obenauf

Schism - New York Hardcore Fanzine
(B9 Press)

Bridge Nine records, always known as a home for east coast hardcore, was ambitious enough to compile and re-release the *Schism* hardcore fanzine issues #6-8, 1987-1988. This was a very important and influential time in NYC and east coast Hardcore. *Schism* acts as a snapshot in time when people were wondering what all these pissed off looking kids were doing running around with black X's on the backs of their hands. While the layout and writing is a bit juvenile, the passion and dedication to the scene is evident. Plus the checklist of now classic interviews is impressive: Side By Side, Warzone, Bold, Supertouch, Krakdown, Gorilla Biscuits, Slapshot, Agnostic Front, Dag Nasty, No For An Answer, SSD, Youth Defense League, Wide Awake and Project X. Also included in this compiled work of hardcore journalism is an impressive collection of vintage tour posters and pages of live shots. A must for any who have claimed straight edge and an interesting read for those who just liked their core hard.

Project X
Straight Edge Revenge
(Bridge Nine)

Released initially as a one-time 7" pressing of 500 copies in 1988, "Straight Edge Revenge" was an insert with NYC Hardcore fanzine *Schism #8*. Project X was a side band featuring members of Judge, Youth of Today, Side by Side, Gorilla Biscuits and Warzone. All of which are arguably the cornerstones of the American hardcore straight edge movement. The music is what one would expect if familiar with the pedigree of the performers, namely in your face, stripped down, barking, no-bullshit hardcore punk. Since these guys were the straightest of the straight, there was no disguising the agenda in the lyrics. Sample: 'I'm as straight as the line that you sniff up your nose, I'm as hard as the booze you swill down your throat.' Hardcore historians, this is a rare gem, previously hard to find, now available thanks to Bridge Nine having the vision to bring this music to streets once again.

bridge9.com

Bushman

Shorts by: **David Gaffney**

HAPPY PLACE

He hated grocery shopping, hated the time it took. But he came up with a method. People bought the same things, more or less. So he would look for someone of his type, sneak up behind them and roll their fully-laden trolley off to the checkout.

It made life interesting. Often there were things he would never have bought; once there was a fat orange pumpkin.

But today he was in trouble. He had been stealing mostly from women because he liked the sense of order to their selections, but his victim had spied him and was stomping over. There were women's products in the cart, so it was going to be difficult. He decided to pretend he knew her.

'Darling, I'll just get eggs'

'We've got eggs' The woman chirped. 'Listen, do you want to go out to the car? You look stressed. You can listen to your tape'.

Potato smiles

When Debbie left I ate nothing but potato smiles with no-frills ketchup. One day I looked at the fluffy orange discs grinning up at me and decided to save one. I stuck it to the wall next to my bed and it cheered me up. The next day I saved another, but I'd had one of my funny days, so I stuck this one upside down, to make a frown. I did this for years and the pattern reminded me how well I was doing.

The man from environmental health had a big oblong body built for blocking doorways. 'The neighbors are talking about a smell,' he said.

I locked the door and made him sit whilst I removed the smiles and heaped them on a plate in front of him. The sauce bottle was rimmed with decaying ketchup scabs. I squeezed, squeezed hard till his plate was full.

WE ARE THE ROBOTS

She was the third girlfriend to ditch me this year.

'We went to this club,' I told Gary, 'and at the end of the night she'd completely changed. She was distant, hostile.'

He looked at me over the rim of his spectacles 'Did you dance?'

'Well,' I poked at a beer mat. 'At one point I did throw a few shapes.'

He tilted his head towards me. 'Did you do the robotics?'

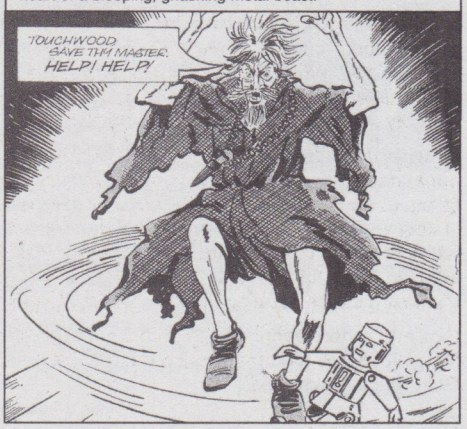
'Definitely not.'

'What was the music?'

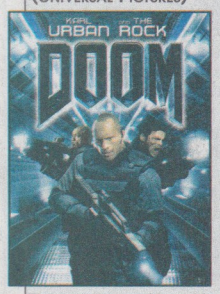
'Eighties retro'

Gary removed his spectacles and rubbed his eyes. 'How many times have we been through this – you hear the music, you do the robotics.' He picked up his coat. 'No woman will stand for it.'

Later I was on the floor. A moog bass line squelched, a metallic snare ripped the air, I was part of a machine, a valve in the heart of a bleeping, gnashing metal beast.



Doom
(Universal Pictures)



The date was May 5th, 1992. The game software company is iD Software (pronounced "id" as in "did), and the game they released on this date is *Wolfenstein 3-D*, a first person shooter which was basically about killing Nazi's. This game was groundbreaking by the fact that it was the cardinal first person shooter (FPS) title... you play thru the eyes of the player (as opposed to third-person games where you see your character). Did I mention you get to kill lots of Nazi's in the game? Tons... the end boss is Adolf fucking Hitler himself (wearing a robotic suit). Interestingly enough, the Wolfenstein 3-D game was banned in Germany. You'd think that killing Nazi's would be good for Germans, but apparently not.

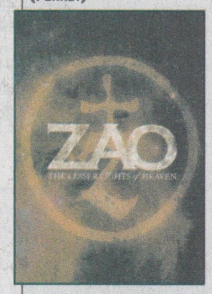
Annnnnnnnyways, the gaming world really exploded a year later when iD debuted the awesome *Doom*. Not as a followup, but a new title itself. Millions of copies sold on multiple platforms. Most readers familiar with *Doom* know the plot, but for the uninformed, here is the gist of it. You (the main character, nameless) are a marine in the future, where humans have bases set up on various planets. After a squabble between you and a senior officer, you're sent (as punishment) to Phobos, one of the two moons of Mars, to check on the secret teleportation experiments being performed by the military. As expected, something goes wrong, and creatures from Hell start pouring out of the gates. Perfect time for a visit! By the time you arrive, just about everyone has been killed and, worst yet, turned into hellish zombies of various shapes and sizes. And that's pretty much *Doom*... the game. The film version's plot, however, varies on comparison, which is both typical and interesting. Typical because any gamer will tell you that, sans an underground anime, there hasn't been a single accurate videogame-to-film transition. Ever. Which, some could say, is for obvious reasons. It's hard to replicate the type of graphics and effects seen in a game on the big screen. The interesting part about *Doom*, however, is that the theme of the gates of Hell being opened has been completely nixed. Yep, the big, scary creatures (which look pretty awesome, by the way) in the film *Doom* are results of genetic experiments... or something. The movie doesn't actually go into too many details... just that you can get infected, and it will turn you into A) a flesh hungry, super pissed off zombie. Want to know why, speculative of course, the premise of Hell was removed from the movie? Fear of negative feedback from Christian groups, which is understand- ... wait, huh? Wouldn't putting the mere existence of a 'hell' in a movie be an admittance of a heaven? Isn't that good, in the eyes of a Christian? Not sure what the problem is, but gripes are gripes.

Speaking of gripes, this movie... man. It's a game that's a movie, so if you're a hardcore gamer, you've obviously already seen this. If you aren't a gamer, this is a 'B minus' type of sci-fi horror film. It's got that idiot The Rock, who I just want to punch in the balls everytime he starts mouthing off and shaking his eyebrow around. What a douchebag. Nevertheless, he also plays (pretty fucking well) the part of Sarge, the squad leader. Definitely looks like the soldier I would want fighting for me in the future, instead of those gawky kids from Arkansas we have now. Squad leader, btw, is another change from the videogame. In the future, you never investigate alone, you bring a squad of ~~zombie food~~ err soldiers with. A few twists here, one or two turns there... not much of a film, brain-wise, but what did you expect? It's fucking *Doom*. Closer to the end is the much heralded FPS (first person shooter) scene, where you watch the movie thru the eyes of shooter. It's a heavy nod to the gamers, who are pretty damn used to that field of view from the game. Overall, meh. It's alright. Could be better, could have been MUCH worse (*Alien Vs. Predator*, anyone?). The DVD that is being released now is the unrated version, which means even after I watched the unrated movie (with its fifteen extra minutes), I actually went and watched the stupid 'how we did this' *Doom* documentary thing and I found it, sadly, somewhat interesting. Also cool is that you can stick this DVD in your Xbox and a demo of *Doom 3* loads up.

doommovie.com

Paul Richter

Zao
The Lesser Lights of Heaven
(Ferret)

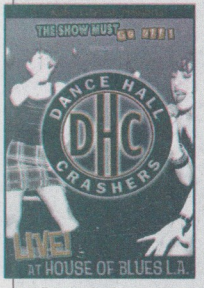


Say what you will about the necessity of overblown DVD releases with hours and hours of footage and elaborate packaging, but looking at Zao's enormously extravagant new DVD it's easy to get caught up in the fury of digital viewing. A gatefold box unfolds to reveal two DVDs; one a biography of the Christian metalcore band's tumultuous career, and the other a disc full of live footage spanning the last decade-plus. The biography is filmed in documentary style and, despite being twice as long as it needs to be, is an intriguing look back at dudes who met in bible school and decided to start a hardcore/metal band. The levels at which the members of Zao progress musically are astounding, and by the time 2005's The Funeral of God comes out the band has undergone many struggles (including multiple member changes) and emerged true saviors in the heavy music scene. Footage of original drummer Jesse Smith (now of Gods) is particularly telling, as the shifty eyes beneath his windswept bangs paint him the troublemaker of the band and the source of much of their despair over the years. When they finally dump Smith and bring intense singer Dan Weyandt (who looks more like the spawn of Satan than a singer in a Christian band) back into the fold, the band seems to finally be at peace. The second disc is crammed full of live show footage, including two complete shows and numerous single songs filmed by fans at various venues. Overblown and indulgent, yes, but fans of Zao and anyone intrigued at the inner workings of a phenomenal metalcore band won't be complaining one bit about this double DVD.

zaoonline.com

Jason Schreurs

Dance Hall Crashers
The Show Must Go Off
(Kung Fu)



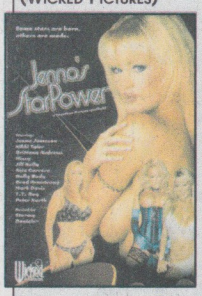
I used to know this girl named Liz. She was the receptionist at some office in Ventura and she seemed pretty cool. Then she told me one of her favorite bands was Dance Hall Crashers and I knew she was probably jacked. And she was. And so is DHC. Kung Fu has pretty much mastered the live band genre at this point, as this DVD marks the 18th notch in their lengthy belt, and the improvements in both audio and video quality from their early days is truly remarkable. The Crashers sadly don't do much to email home about as they stumble through their 23 track set list without much in the way of either dancing or crashing. My favorite part of this video is actually the jacked people in the audience, as it takes a special someone to show up at a female-fronted ska show these days and there are certainly lots of special someone's at The House of Blues. There are the expected 'our band is so much fun' songs ("DHC", "Don't Wanna Behave"), the blatantly sappy romantic songs ("He Wants Me Back") and the rest are even worse. Don't worry though, the next dvd (#19) is the Bouncing Souls. Sweet.

kungfurecords.com

Brian Greenaway

Hey, want a free DVD of *Doom*, courtesy of Universal Pictures? Those crazy bastards sent us a bunch of copies, and the first dozen people who email doom@modernfix.com get one. You might argue that giving away copies of *Doom* directly under the review isn't right, but what the fuck. They were free. Take them.

Jenna Jameson
Jenna's Star Power
(Wicked Pictures)

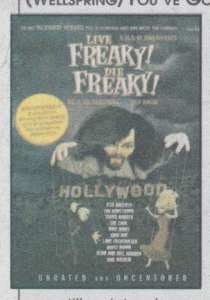


This compilation of scenes from various adult films starring the iconic adult film star Jenna Jameson has enough blowjobs and pussy licking to fill a lifetime! Featuring scenes dating back to the early nineties, this is perhaps the most thorough documentation of Jenna's stellar career as the world's premier adult film star. Hosted by Stormy Daniels, AVN's 2004 starlet of the year "Star Power" contains scenes featuring some of the top names in porn – Nikki Tyler, Brittany Andrews, Jill Kelly, and Mr. Peter North are a few of the stars you can catch on this titillating DVD. Like it says on the box, "Enjoy this collection and relive these memorable scenes."

wickedpictures.com

Gordon Downs

John Roecker's
Live Freaky Die Freaky
(Wellspring/You've Got Bad Taste)



If you read all of the reviews of John Roecker's claymation parody of Manson's hippie death squad, Live Freaky Die Freaky, you will notice that there is finally consensus among critics. The movie really does "climax in about ten minutes", although to be fair, I thought the best scene was right at the 12 minute mark. Fans of *Sloaches Fun House* and *Meet the Feebles* will love the abominably ugly claymation and dirty sex scenes. After the shock of puppet sex and violence wears off, you still get to play name that pop punk icon with voices supplied by Green Day, Good Charlotte, Rancid, L7, White Zombie, Kelly Osbourne, F-Minus, AFI, X, Distillers, Blink 182, Transplants and Luna Chicks. *Live Freaky Die Freaky* is entertaining in the strain of *Straight to Hell*, *Edge of Quarrel* and *Wild Zero*. Musicians are great for lindie films.

livefreakydiefreaky.com

Jeni Generic

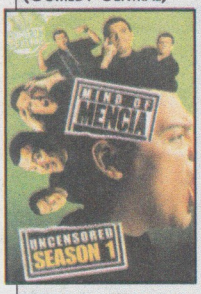
Mushroomhead
Volume 1
(Lumberjack)

For fans only (but who else really?). There are music videos included, professionally shot, edited and all slicked up with green filters and worms and Trojan rabbits and shit like that. But mostly, the video consists of scenes from the road. We get to see the band in and out of costume, goofing off on their tour bus and in hotel rooms, green rooms, outside the Alamo... all the usual locales for a band on tour. They are men and to prove themselves they call each other "bitch" a lot and make numerous gay jokes. When you're a group of eight guys all stacked up on each other in a tour bus you have to reaffirm your heterosexuality by calling everyone else's into question. But why question your band mates' allegiance to the heterosexual lifestyle unless you're looking for them, in a moment of tender intimacy, to question it themselves? I can't wait for "Volume 2," in which many of these bi/gay/curious questions will be answered.

mushroomhead.com

DICK

Mind of Mencia
Uncensored Season 1
(Comedy Central)



This two DVD set of Carlos Mencia's season one show is truly a mixed blessing. On one hand, finding good Hispanic comedians is hard to find. On the other, Mencia has yet to bring his true talent to his television show. Sure, there are laughs here and there... it's pretty easy to poke fun at racial stereotypes, but with Dave Chappelle's staple characters, Mencia's come off second rate. He tends to run jokes truly into the ground, not even pausing as he buries them into further, awkward anecdotes. When was the last time you heard the word 'beaner' used? *Born in East LA* playing on a Saturday afternoon on TNT? Carlos's show is struggling on the verge of being either hilarious, or a Chappelle knockoff reeking with the stench of cancellation. For fans, this DVD does contain a few extra bits, like deleted scenes and audio commentary by Mencia in Spanish.

comedycentral.com

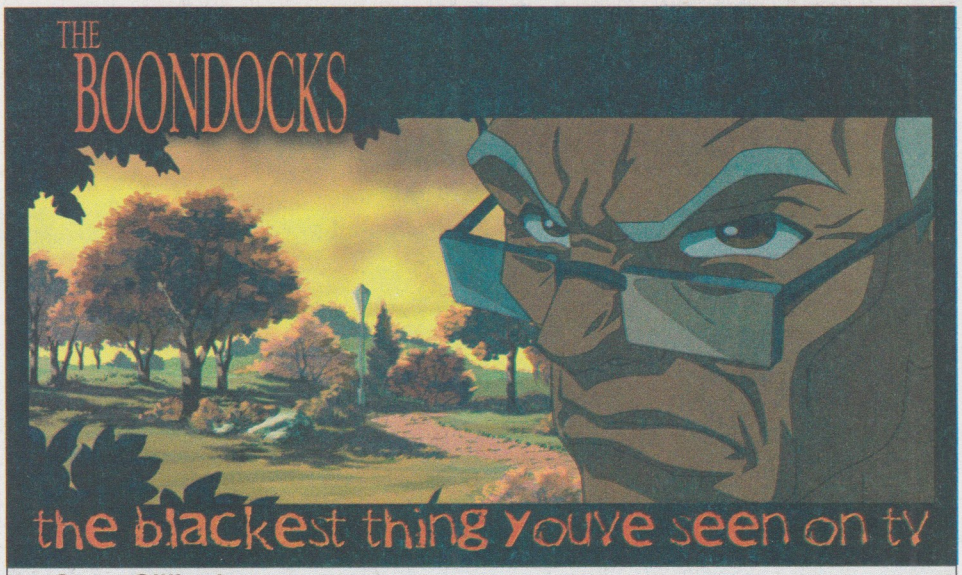
Paul Richter

Sepultura
Live in Sao Paulo
(SPV)

Coffin Joe comes out in a top hat with long curled fingernails, bushy eyebrows and his wild theatrical stare to introduce the band. You won't know what he's saying unless you speak Portuguese, however; it's great to see the icon of Brazilian horror nod his wicked hat to the icons of Brazilian metal. The concert footage, well-shot from multiple camera sources, spans songs from across their career, and although it's nice hearing the old tunes there's still something sad about the voice belting them out not belonging to Max. There are many highlights, including Ratos De Parao's singer coming out to sing one of their songs, and the Biotech medley that pays tribute to the twin godfathers' of metal: BS and LZ. The energy is high in what is virtually the Sep's hometown. The first DVD of this two-disc release also contains a making of featurette that should be of mild interest to fans. The second DVD of the set includes a documentary, which appears to have been directed by new singer (I don't know how new he is anymore) Derrick Green, and serves the function of bringing the fans closer to accepting Derrick Green as part of the band. This disc also contains three videos for newer songs and three bonus live tracks and a slideshow.

sepultura.com.br

DICK



by Steve Gilliard

[Al Sharpton recently criticized an episode of Boondocks, which... well, let ABC News explain it...]

> NEW YORK - The Rev.Al Sharpton has asked for an apology from Cartoon Network for an episode of edgy animated series "The Boondocks" that shows the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. saying the n-word.
>
> "Cartoon Network must apologize and also commit to pulling episodes that desecrate black historic figures," Sharpton, a civil-rights activist and former Democratic presidential candidate, said in a statement Tuesday. "We are totally offended by the continuous use of the n-word in McGruder's show."
>
> The episode, "The Return of the King," aired Jan. 15, the day before the national holiday honoring the slain civil-rights leader. It shows King emerging from a coma and using the n-word in an angry speech venting his frustration toward sexually explicit hip-hop videos, among other things.
>
> In the episode, King is branded a traitor and terrorist sympathizer for his "turn-the-other cheek" philosophy of nonviolence in response to post-Sept. 11 retaliation. Exhausted, he moves to Canada, but his speech provokes a second civil-rights revolution.

So don't watch the show.

You have BET showing uncut videos which are basically strippers, and silence from the black community. The problem is not the videos, but the network which shows them. Then you have the absolutely useless editor of Essence who wants to tell rappers what to say.

Earth to critics: black writers and performers work under the same First Amendment as anyone else. If you don't like what people have to say, don't buy their books or watch their shows. You don't have the right to demand a retraction or to tell McGruder what to say on his show. If you want to talk about denigrating the King legacy, get the King family on the phone and ask them why they have mismanaged their foundation. They still selling Yolanda's book there? The fact is that McGruder is unsparing about black culture and folkways in a way which is pretty much undecipherable to white America. They may get the jokes, but not the context. It's why Diary of a Mad Black Woman escaped most reviewers while making a fist full of money.

The first episode of Boondocks mocked the tendency of hero worship in the black community. Another, the fake gangsterism of rappers, which ends with the rapper and his former lover kissing. That is pretty fucking radical for black America. The ONLY other place you see black men kissing is Jerry Springer. But there it was, revealing something widely acknowledged in private. Last week's episode "The Itis" discussed the problem with eating tons of soul food. The grandfather creates a burger with five slices of bacon, cheese and placed between two grilled Krispy Kreme doughnuts. Needless to say, it turns into crack, with people begging for food and hanging outside his new restaurant.

Besides the gorgeous, anime-level animation, the politics here are much more aggressive than in the strip. The word nigga is the least reason to complain about the show. The grandfather beats a man to death over an argument, Uncle Rukus is a self-hating black man who would surpass the clowns who work for NRO. In short, there is a lot to dislike about the show.

But, the fact is that this is the first time a non-rapper, non-novelist gets to have a forum to discuss black life from someone under 50. This is a nearly unique perspective on modern African American life and it is not comfortable at times. But it is not ignorant either. It is extremely well thought out and makes points in a way which need to be made.

The King show was NOT critical of King in any way. It was, however, a brutal take on our celebrity driven culture and how trivial many black people have become. It made a point that people need to reclaim their dignity and stop worrying about Diddy's latest acquisition. In fact it lamented his absence in a very real way, an important way. In fact, McGruder showed greater fidelity to King's message than his own family has in recent years.

We have so many people making trivial messages and making millions, yet, these people want to go after McGruder for a word we all use? That's bullshit and it's wrongheaded. There's a deeper message in his work, if you want to find it.

TOP5'S | 5UGGESTION5 FROM MF 5TAFF

Michael Bushman

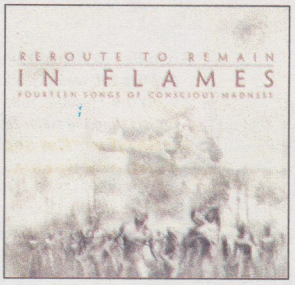
Blessing The Hogs "12 Gauge Solution" (Goodfellow)
- *Crawling scraping pummeling piggy metalcore.*

Bloc Party "Silent Alarm" (Vice)
- *Guitar pop just won't stop.*

Burst "Origo" (Relapse)
- *Creative and layered abrasion tactics.*

Children of Bodom "Are You Dead Yet" (Spinefarm)
- *In Flames fans, line up.*

The Doors "Complete Studio Recordings" (Elektra)
- *All hail the lizard king.*



Barry Dejasu

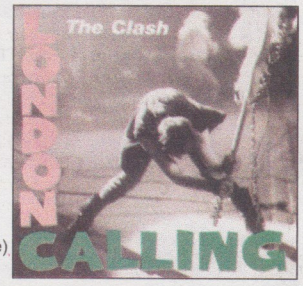
In Flames "Come Clarity" (Ferret)
- *Gritty, melodic, heavy. Classic style.*

Ulver "Metamorphosis EP" (Jester)
- *Excellent post-black electronic treat.*

Weakling "Dead As Dreams" (tUMULt)
- *Black metal PERFECTION - no bullshit.*

Bohren & Der Club of Gore "Black Earth" (Ipecac)
- *Slow, dark, ambient jazz. CREEPY!*

In Flames "Reroute to Remain" (Nuclear Blast)
- *Grossly underrated. Epic, heavy, unique!*



Chris Pacifico

The Kinks "Village Green Preservation Society" (Reprise)
- *Deliberately mocking the English life.*

The New Pornographers "Twin Cinema" (Matodor)
- *Full of power pop goodness.*

Art Brut "Bang Bang Rock and Roll" (Fierce Panda)
- *Dry, witty and snottty Brits.*

The Clash "London Calling" (Epic)
- *This makes me really defiant.*

The Futureheads "The Futureheads" (Sire)
- *Espresso pop ala ADHD spunkiness.*

Kate Bartkiewicz

Stars "Set Yourself On Fire" (Arts and Crafts)
- *Destructive love letters never sent.*

Feist "Let It Die" (Interscope)
- *It's prettier without the "y."*

LCD Soundsystem "Self-Titled" (Capitol)
- *Like a new millennium Kraftwerk.*

The Bens "Self-Titled EP" (Sony)
- *All my favorite Bens unite!*

Rilo Kiley "More Adventurous" (Brute/Beaute)
- *Folk rock with sexy swearing.*

Eric Huntington

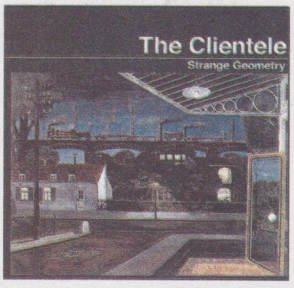
Jay-Z "Reasonable Doubt" (Priority)
- *Before Jay-Z turned into shit.*

Fugazi "Instrumental Soundtrack" (Dischord)
- *Seriously the best Fugazi ever.*

JeJune "This Afternoon's Malady" (Big Wheel)
- *Damn these guys for leaving.*

Various "Ratatat Remixes" (Audiodregs)
- *Make new fucking music already.*

The Roots "Do This Well" (Dysfunctional Youth)
- *Good shit for good people.*



James Wright

MASTERY "Lethal Legacy" (Spinerazor)
- *MASTERY of Puppets. Nuff said.*

Dog Fashion Disco "Adultery" (Rotten)
- *Tarantino flick put to music.*

Anti-Flag "For Blood and Empire" (RCA)
- *Anti-Flag's best record, hands down.*

Buckcherry "Fifteen" (Universal)
- *No frills rock n' roll.*

Bullet For My Valentine "The Poison" (Trustkill)
- *Trivium meets the Lost Prophets.*

Teddy Rizzo

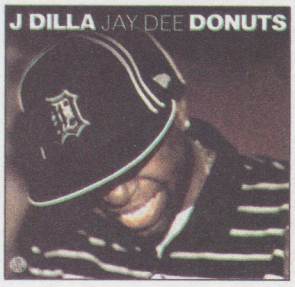
Bonobo "Live Sessions" (Ninja Tune)
- *Smoother than any studio release.*

Blue Scholars "Self Titled" (Blue Scholars)
- *No cliches from Northwest Duo.*

Thievery Corporation "Cosmic Game" (18th Street)
- *They never seem to disappoint.*

Ulrich Schnauss "Far Away Trains Passing By" (Domino)
- *A world of his own.*

Lee Oskar "The Best of Lee Oskar" (Avenue)
- *San Francisco Bay is amazing.*



Peter Soyer

The Mountain Goats "The Sunset Tree" (4AD)
- *Dance music saved my life.*

Bonnie "Prince" Billy & Matt Sweeney "Superwolf" (Drag City)
- *Will Oldham needs a hug.*

Danger Doom "The Mouse and the Mask" (Epitaph)
- *This is Sofa King great.*

Bruce Springsteen "Nebraska" (Sony)
- *Still strong 20 years later.*

The Boy Least Likely To "The Best Party Ever" (To Young to Die)
- *Cheery like a McDonald's party.*

Andrew Nosnitsky

Too Short "Blow The Whistle" (Jive)
- *Lil' Jon cooks while Short raps.*

K-Rino - Worst Rapper Alive (Black Book)
- *The return of Houston'S OG.*

Various "Big Apple Rappin" (Soul Jazz)
- *Records from rap's infant years.*

Ghostface "Fishscale" (Def Jam)
- *Possibly the greatest rapper alive?*

Young Bleed "Rise Through The Ranks" (West Coast Mafia)
- *Another melancholic blues rap LP.*

Dailyn Brown

Of Montreal "The Sunlandic Twins" (Polyvinyl)
- *"Let's pretend we don't exist."*

Wolf Parade "Apologies to the Queen Mary" (Sub-Pop)
- *Rock recipe: dark, gritty...excellent!*

Danger Doom "The Mouse and The Mask" (Epitaph)
- *Cartoon Network meets hiphop masters.*

Seu Jorge "The Life Aquatic-Studio Sessions" (Hollywood)
- *Sexy Portuguese upgrade of Bowie.*

Röyksopp "The Understanding" (Virgin France)
- *Finnish transcribes into electronic brilliance.*

David Tow

Explosions In The Sky "Those Who Tell..." (Temporary Residence)
- *Like Mogwai but way better.*

T. Rex "The Slider" (Edsel)
- *Listen to only Marc Bolan.*

Lagwagon "Double Plaidinum" (Fat Wreck)
- *I think I'm 16 again.*

Buck 65 "Secret House Against The World" (WEA)
- *Dude does serious hip hop.*

Jens Lekman "You're So Silent Jens" (Secretly Canadian)
- *Jens wears suits of armor.*

Gordon Downs

Loose Fur "Born Again In The USA" (Drag City)
- *Pure rock music from Chicago.*

Liars "Drum's Not Dead" (Mute)
- *Intoxicating rhythms with trippy effects*

Tortoise & Bonnie Prince Billy "The Brave & The Bold" (Overcoat)
- *Thunder Road changed my life*

Ciccone Youth "Whitey Album" (Geffen)
- *Long overdue reissue from Sonics*

God Is A Moog "The Electronic Prayers Of Gershon Kigsley" (Reboot)
- *Yiddish never sounded so good*

Ivan Fernandez

Test Icicles "For Screening Purposes Only" (Domino)
- *Their first and last album.*

Editors "The Back Room" (Kitchenware)
- *Equal parts happy and sad.*

The Clientele "Strange Geometry" (Merge)
- *Crying even when they're happy.*

Wolfmother "Dimensions" (Modular)
- *Led Zeppelin meets Black Sabbath.*

Colored Shadows "Tiger Mask" (independent)
- *One of Los Angeles' best.*

Melvin Gaye

Blue Scholars "Blue Scholars" (Blue Scholars)
- *Classic hip hop from Seattle.*

Black Eyed Peas "Monkey Business" (A&M)
- *Yes, you read that right.*

J Dilla "Donuts" (Stones Throw)
- *The good always die young.*

Cunninlynguists "A Piece Of Strange" (L.A. Underground)
- *Sick beats and dope rhymes.*

Common Market "Common Market" (Sciontific)
- *More great Seattle hip hop.*

Brian Greenaway

Rogue Wave "Descend Like Vultures" (SubPop)
- *Nirvana cover live is sick.*

Electric President "S/T" (Morr Music)
- *Music from THE OC bitches.*

Jack Johnson "Curious George" (Universal)
- *Guitar, beach, bonfire, beer, Jack.*

Smashing Pumpkins "Siamese Dream" (Virgin)
- *"Today" is still dope ass.*

Josh Ritter "Hello Starling" (Signature)
- *Folk and Country and Rock.*

Rama Somhani

Black Moses "Royal Stink" (Rootbag)
- *Old school head nod funk.*

Drive By Truckers "The Dirty South" (New West)
- *Best Southern rock since Skynyrd.*

Bob Dylan "Greatest Hits" (Columbia)
- *Still relevant after 40 years.*

Pride 'n Glory "Pride 'n Glory" (Geffen)
- *Beer swillin', banjo pickin' rock.*

Buckcherry "Buckcherry" (Dreamworks)
- *I'm all lit up again.*

Jesse Mann

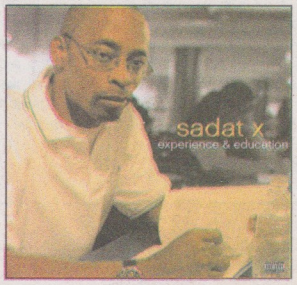
Herbert "Scale" (K7/Accidental)
- *Poptastic bleeped out swing jazz.*

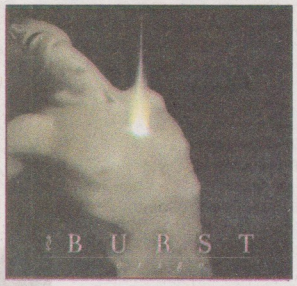
Jamie Lidell "Multiply" (Warp)
- *If Aphex Twin remixed Stevie.*

Roisin Murphy "Ruby Blue" (Echo)
- *Tori Amos on the crack.*

Ghostface "Fishscale" (Def Jam)
- *Hip-hop as raw as sushi.*

Dave Brubeck Quartet "Time Further Out" (Columbia Jazz)
- *Some things never get old.*





EJ Binns

Engine Down "Demure" (Lovitt)
- *Favorite to fall asleep to.*

Cursive "Domestica" (Saddle Creek)
- *Raw + original + aggressive + honest = outstanding.*

On The Might Of Princes "Where You Are... / Sirens" (Revelation)
- *Only two words: "FUCKING AMAZING"*

Harvey Danger "Where Have All The Merrymakers Gone?" (Slash)
- *Guilty pleasure since age thirteen.*

Denali "Denali / The Instinct" (Jade Tree)
- *Sexiest girl alive, I believe.*

Rei Nishimoto

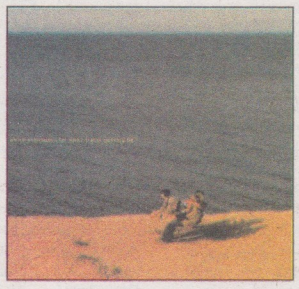
Sepultura "Dante XXII" (SPV)
- *Italian lit goes concept thrash!!!*

In Flames "Come Clarity" (Ferret)
- *Swedes bring back the metal!!!*

Sevendust "Next" (Winedark)
- *Modern rock with an edge.*

Overcast "Fight Ambition To Kill" (Edison)
- *Classic Boston thrashcore never dies.*

Something Of A Sillouette "S/T" (Devils Head)
- *Something mellow for the soul.*



Jeremiah Griffey

Rose For Bohdan "Everybody Hugged (Racism is God)" (Deathbomb Arc)
- *Fighting L.A. racism with love.*

TV on the Radio "Desperate Youth, Bloodthirsty Babes" (Touch & Go)
- *Anticipating the major label debut.*

LesSavyFav "Cat and the Cobra" (French Kiss)
- *It, well, rocks the party.*

Zuinosin "Zuinosin" (De-Fragment)
- *Japan is the next Seattle.*

The Mae Shi "Heartbeeps" (5RC)
- *Mentioned in mainstream? What the...*

Cosmo Lee

Akercocke "Words That Go Unspoken..." (Earache)
- *Early contender, best metal '06.*

Doomriders "Black Thunder" (Deathwish)
- *Thin Lizzy? Converge? Hell yeah.*

Krisiun "AssassiNation" (Century Media)
- *Brazilian death metal kings - Sepulwho?*

Collabs 3000 "Metalism" (Novamute)
- *No pansy-ass minimal techno here.*

Burst "Origo" (Relapse)
- *Isis fans, go buy immediately.*

Robbie Ettelson

Blaq Poet "Rewind: Deja Screw" (Screwball)
- *Return of the Hu-Haa!*

Black Rob "The Black Rob Report" (Bad Boy)
- *Diddy finally gets it right.*

Sadat X "Experience & Education" (Female Fun)
- *Last years' finest still wins.*

DJ Mark The 45 King "Put The Funk Out There" (vinyl white label)
- *Jay-Z plus "Stiletto" equals Classic.*

J-Love & Raekwon The Chef "Only Built For The Streets II" (mixtape)
- *Until the official album drops....*

Chad Bowar

In Flames "Come Clarity" (Ferret)
- *First class melodic death metal.*

Lacuna Coil "Karmacode" (Century Media)
- *Hot singer, polished goth metal.*

Queensryche "Operation Mindcrime II" (Rhino)
- *A worthy sequel, plus Dio!*

Devin Townsend Band "Synchestra" (Inside Out)
- *The softer side of Devin.*

Krisiun "AssassiNation" (Century Media)
- *Intense, brutal Brazilian death metal.*

Unsigned Bands Need Love Too

It's that time again, when we let our resident glutton for abuse Brian Greenway clean out the bin of CDs sent to us by the "unsigned band". We believe anyone has the right to be in a band and make music, no matter what your talent level. However, when you release it to the world, and even worse, send it to a bunch of jaded critical fucks like us when your talent level hasn't matured, well, you deserve the slap upside the head you are about to receive for polluting the already over-saturated world of music, wasting more plastic on shrink wrapping your godawful racket.

Or maybe you rock.

Greenway tells it like it is:

Terramara **"Four Blocks to Hennepin"**
But only fifteen feet to the trashcan.

Broken **"Haoma"**
Yeah, we took our name from a NIN song and our talent from our dog's ass.

Cameron Ember **"Good Things Happen...To Bad People"**
Bad CDs happen to good people, too.

Hans York **"Inside Out"**
Trippy hippy folky music that deserves to die a slow painful death.

Walter Hnot's Acoustics **"Freakin' Fresh"**
You'd think it would be hard to overproduce something that is acoustic but somehow Walter manages to do just that. Bravo.

Matthew Black Orchestra **"That's All There Is"**
I used to work with a guy named Matt Black. I thought he had bad taste in music, too.

Ricky Lee Robinson **"Mushu Pork"**
What, you're naming your album after food? Who are you, Wesley Willis?

The Experiments **"Self-Titled"**
Live and fairly unappealing. The guitars are in Los Angeles and the vox in San Diego.

David Hales **"On My Own"**
If you're wondering why you're so lonely it's probably cos you're a total puss and lamer than Rob Thomas.

Malkovich Music **"Skeletons"**
Soulful hip hop from this sort of ugly dude.

The Subjects **"Self-Titled"**
Catchy and off-kilter New Pornographers type rock. This is good stuff.
gosubjectsgo.com

The Blackfire Revelation **"Gold and Guns on 51"**
Hey guys, thanks for the jewel case, I was almost out. Your CD? Uh, yeah...thanks for that too.

The Boroughs **"Ostrich"**
Dude, that topless chick on the over is hot! Oh, wait, it's a little baby. Nevermind.

Ham1 **"Self-Titled"**
Sgt. Peppers-esque trip-rock that's actually not that bad. I semi-recommend this one.

Matt Sandy Band **"Song of the Day, Vol. 1"**
I'm sure these guys will put out lots of other Volumes.

Naglfar
Pariah
(Century Media)

On their fourth release, Sweden's Naglfar continue to reign at the top of Black Metal mountain. Things sound much better than their previous release due to the increased production. While still having that gritty black metal sound, the drums have been put into the mix better and can actually be heard this time around. Most notable about the release though is the introduction of of bass player Olivius on vocals, after the departure of Jens Ryden. His vocals are deeper and much more vicious, adding to the bands searing sound. Powerfully hit drums, scorching rhythm guitar riffs and haunting melodies round out what is easily one of the best (and most evil) albums of the year. Fucking necro.
naglfar.net

Justin Wittenmeier

Broken Social Scene
Self-Titled
(Arts & Crafts)

Broken Social Scene is back again and if you are not familiar with their collective of multi-instrumental artists then you might recognize them from such Canadian groups as Stars and Metric. Though at times the music may sound chaotic to the untrained ear, every note is purely intentional and resonates with emotion. BSS has a layered sound of jamming guitars and an unruly choral feeling, partially because of the wonderful quality of diversity that comes from having such a large group of musicians. They can afford to shuffle singers around and switch instruments so BSS has a unique sound that changes from track to track. It might be hard to ever beat the indie classic, "You Forgot It In People," but this new release has a lot of promise.
arts-crafts.ca/bss

Dailyn Brown

Hostage Life
Sing for the Enemy
(Underground Operations)

"Sing for the Enemy" is fast and loud with big guitars, like older Guttermouth with a better singer. At only six tracks, this li'l EP blows by faster than a Kiera Knightly inspired daydream in math class but packs enough punch to stay with you much longer than "Domino" possibly could. While mindless genres like 'skate punk' are never going to conjure much more than blistering guitars, Hostage Life does their best to keep things socially conscious and relevant. The most memorable track is probably "Money Parade", which drops hip-hop lyrics like they're hot throughout the frenetic tune. This is good.
hostagelife.com

Brian Greenaway

Outsmarting Simon
Stand Up Straight
(Triple Crown)

Surprising and dramatic indie rock from this New Jersey quartet. Outsmarting Simon bring atmospheric crescendos with fresh, almost math rock-y breakdowns (see: Appleseed Cast, Elliott). The good thing about Outsmarting Simon is that they possess one skill many of the homage payers of Sunny Day out there lack: a singer who can really sing. In addition to that, they merely use the model of their influence while breaking their mold and really truly owning it themselves. This is what indie rock should be sounding like.
outsmartingsimon.com

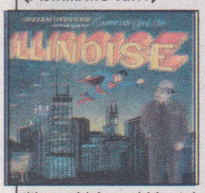
Dave Tow

Latterman
No Matter Where We Go...!
(Deep Elm)

Does anyone out there remember Longfellow? Anyone? Latterman sounds a hell of a lot like what Longfellow should be doing about now. This album brought by the indie-heads at Deep Elm is some good old power pop. Anyone familiar with Jamison-Parker or the like will be really stoked. Also anyone who lived in or around Orange County during the mid-late 90's will recognize the sound. These guys are playing their hearts out for music they believe in. Latterman effectively reinvent the wheel on this record: merging politics radicalism and sexism, racism, homophobia and other social injustices (traditionally thought of as 'punk-rock' ideals) with power-pop. These guys aren't pushing the musical envelope here, but if half the 'hip' artists tried as hard as these guys did, music would be headed in a much better direction.
www.lattermanband.com

Dave Tow

Sufjan Stevens
Illinois
(Asthmatic Kitty)



For his quiet nature and size Sufjan (pronounced, Suf-ee-un) has quite a large vision. The newest album, "Illinois" is the 2nd in his "States" project (he already hit up Michigan in a previous album). It is Sufjans' personal American history lesson, given one state at a time. Each song has up to four different subtitles, which could be taken as comedy or pretentiousness but either way the album is a small-scale musical masterpiece. Touring with what resembles a clean-cut youth group/cheerleading quad each voice harmonizes beautifully and includes Sufjans' trademark falsetto soaring above. In comparison to "Seven Swans" the new sound is much fuller but don't worry folkies, he still keeps it real on the banjo!
asmatickitty.com

Dailyn Brown

The Rocketz
Rise of the Undead
(Psychobilly US)

There's no denying that The Rocketz are a psychobilly band, but their debut album will definitely appeal to fans outside of the genre. The release has a horror/sci-fi bent, like '50's style rock and roll in a dark alley, but the overall sound is cleaner and slightly poppier than some of their contemporaries. The catchy title track is reminiscent of Social Distortion and "No Use for a Name" might have written "Get Away" if they were a psychobilly band. The psychobilly sound is very specific, but The Rocketz manage to keep it sounding fresh and original.
therocketz.com

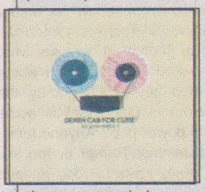
Matt Walker

Pelican
March into the Sea
(Hydra Head)

With two tracks lasting over 32 minutes, this CD single is more like an EP. The first track is the full 20-minute version of "March into the Sea"; the version on Pelican's latest album lasts only 10 minutes. This Chicago band is four guys that play "instru-metal" - that is, with no singer. Expect an epic, dynamic sound that hits both crashing climaxes and mellow, emotive passages. This track somehow morphs into piano, acoustic guitar, and flute textures. The second track is a remix by Justin Broadrick of Godflesh and Jesu fame. The remix sounds just like a Jesu track, complete with majestic drones and ten-ton drums. Hydra Head can do no wrong at the moment.
hydrahead.com/pelican

Cosmo Lee

Death Cab For Cutie
The John Byrd E.P.
(Barsuk)



Death Cab doesn't lose anything from their sound when they go live—but they sure don't gain anything either. It's like the band spends so much time perfecting tracks in the writing/recording process that they seem sick of 'em by the time touring comes around. If you agree with me on that, then this live EP won't change your mind—even the band's dialogue with the audience seems pretty stale. If you're mutilating me with mind-bullets for my Death Cab blasphemy, ignore me and listen to the "Blacking Out The Friction/Brand New Love" blend in the last track - it's a nice twist.

barsuk.com

Kate Bartkiewicz

Kash
Open
(Sick Room)

This is a real headscratcher. Four guys from Italy brew up a strange mix of unpredictable, extremely jerky post-rock with occasional saxophones and vocals heavy on whispers, falsettos, and screams. Imagine the Simpsons lampooning Yoko Ono's music, except with male vocals and indie rock instrumentation. Some tracks are more song-like, while others break down to sparse textures. The liner notes feature photos of each band member wearing a creepy clown wig and mask. The whole package is unsettling like that.

kash.it

Cosmo Lee

Kids Like Us
Outta Control
(Eulogy)

Hi, we're Kids Like Us and we'd like to talk about our new record. It's uh…well, it's pretty loud and yeah, it'll be kind of tough to hear what Lars, our singer, is saying cos he's sort of far back in the mix but, well, to be honest he doesn't really say too much anyway. He pretty much just sort of talks about like people who have sold out and like skateboards and stuff…he's a pretty good skater, you know. And our music's pretty much just like hardcore with some like Terror influences and we sometimes do like a little sludgy type stuff cos we're like from the South you know, so we gotta represent and stuff but really it's just a sweaty old hardcore record and there's not too much else to say about it cos it's really short and we play fast. And yeah, I guess that's about it.

eulogyrecordings.com

Brian Greenaway

Maxïmo Park
Apply Some Pressure
(Warp)

Maxïmo Park is punkish power pop with a hard edge. There is a frantic, desperate energy to the group's rushing songs. However, this strikes one as more stimulated than stimulating. There is a nice blend of the melody and the manic to this accelerated indie pop from Britain. For those on the lookout for songs that reflect basic properties of physics, the title track instructs us "When you apply some pressure/You lose pressure". This elucidates plainly why one can never accurately assess tire pressure on a car. Slower pieces on this four-song EP, like "The Coast is Always Changing", have a bouncy feel reminiscent of The Pogues.

warprecords.com

Tom "Tearaway" Schulte

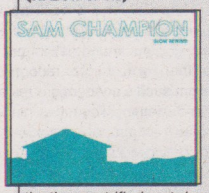
Charlemagne
Detour Allure
(SideCho)

If you're going to be country and you're going to be rock and roll (or pop in this case), you're going to be Charlemagne. With the labels like Wilco-esque, alt-country sugary-pop floating around this band like flies at the 4H booth, you know what you're getting from the first note of "Greyhound." A sliding guitar blankets an understated rhythm section while Carl Johns spreads his voice over everything like icing. And in case you get sleepy listening to "Detour Allure's" opener, the pop is in full effect on "Pink and Silver." Johns and his guest musicians may be serving soda cupfuls of frosting, but there is a sharp edge underneath that burrows in your head and sits there making you mull it over. "Detour Allure" is great from end to end and even surpasses Johns' previous solo Charlemagne effort.

beholdcharlemagne.com

Pete Soyer

Sam Champion
Slow Rewind
(Razor & Tie)



This NYC quartet delivers easy-going 2 1/2 minute countrified indie jams. Definitely possessing Stephen Malkmus' sense of self-deprecation and a CCR good-old-boy delivery, Sam Champion make some catchy tunes. Like fellow, country-poppers Guster, Sam Champion make music that is distinctly countrified, yet does so without becoming kitsch.

razorandtie.com

Dave Tow

Twilight
Self-Titled
(Southern Lord)

I'm listening to the first track "Woe is the Contagion" and I'm already scared, chilled to the fucking bone... terrified by this dense buzzing sludge. It sounds like all hell being birthed through a very small marsupials vaginal canal. The vocals echo in from a great distance, and the whole effect kind of sounds as if the entire record had been recorded through a big wet sponge. The production on the second track takes us halfway through the sponge and closer to the chaos. It's some of the coolest lo-fi shit heard in a long while, although the drums certainly suffer the most from this kind of treatment, the overall creep factor can't be denied. This is a black metal album that actually sounds scary. Play it for the trick-or-treaters on Halloween. It beats the hell out of your old worn out tape of creaking hinges, rattling chains and sickly moans you've been playing on your ghetto blaster for the last ten Halloweens.

southernlord.com

DICK

Every Time I Die
Gutter Phenomenon
(Ferret)

ETID is metal with a brain, as the lyrics on "Gutter Phenomenon" are head and shoulders above the pedantic, garbled metal lyrics. Along with fellow metalcore acts like Terror and As I Lay Dying, Every Time I Die rips through each track with reckless abandon, keeping the unrelenting guitars and Mike Novak's ridiculous drumming cranked to an eleven. That's not to say "Phenomenon" doesn't blaze new musical paths however, as "Champing at the Bit" invokes harmonies by way of Glassjaw's Daryl Palumbo. This album is metal with a point - yeah things suck but that's not to say that with a few cathartic blast beats, things won't get better. Get on it.

everytimeidie.com

Brian Greenaway

Kayo Dot
Dowsing Anemone with Copper Tongue
(Robotic Empire)

This is the soundtrack to a severe case of Attention Deficit Disorder. There is no way to give an impression of this release as whole. Instead, a track by track analysis is necessary. 1) Annoying as fuck. 'Eyaaaaayaayayayayaaaaa' does not count as a vocal track. 2) Drums, horn, guitars and vocals wrap themselves up warm in a lulling sweet offering. 3) An uncomfortable piano crawl with jazz drums. Like if the Paper Chase had a weird cousin. The track crashes in an orgy of strings and quick tempos before destroying itself in a suicide of climactic distortions. 4) A Floyd-esque prog rock odyssey that derails into a Neurosis like slow crawl of dieing and banging on garbage cans. 5) Shoegazing moper indie rock. This release is all across the board, must take an incredible effort to write and pull together, and should be appreciated for the exercise in art that it is. The minimal lyrics are as cryptic and well put together as the music. The abrasive and distracted nature and many tangents will isolate the weak from the listening pool. Are you in the deep end?

roboticempire.com

Bushman

Jenny Lewis
Rabbit Fur Coat
(Team Love)

In between backing Gibbard in Postal Service, stopping hearts with Rilo Kiley, opening for Cold Play and bringing indie kids to their knees everywhere, Jenny Lewis still has time to release a solo album that sounds fresh and gritty. With some encouragement from a friend named Conor, Lewis decided to release this smattering of solo material she had been working on. The songs have distant echoes of Loretta Lynn and Neko Case, but Lewis stands mostly on her own. Also featured throughout the CD are the Watson twins. The Watsons are a pair from Kentucky who harmonize like their singing from the same throat. Their gothic/gospel inspiration floats under Lewis throughout the CD while she lays her vocals down like honey. "Handle With Care" sees some of indie's big guns come out for some support. Ben Gibbard, M. Ward and Conor Oberst all sing back-up to Lewis as she gives new life to Traveling Wilburys' classic. For the nights when your girlfriend won't come home or your old acoustic guitar finally cracked, Lewis will hold your hand. When the album is sad it feels like a hug from a friend at a funeral, but when it's happy it feels like fingers in your hair. Is there anything Lewis can't do?

team-love.com/new/bands/jenny

Pete Soyer

The Braves
Love and Mercy
(Johann's Face)

While the band do occasionally luck out and stumble into Posies territory, the band that comes to mind while listening to "Love and Mercy" is the Gin Blossoms. Seriously, they sound like the Gin Blossoms. Vocalist Joseph Reina's pleasant, earnest tenor is a dead-on replication of head Blossom Robin Wilson, and the band's lyrics and structures are also reminiscent of said '90s wonders. Lest this be taken the wrong way, let me say that "Love and Mercy" is by all means a good (though not great) pop-rock record. The songs are mildly memorable, and the band members are skilled enough that they aren't just pounding away at their instruments. If nothing else, it's refreshing to hear a modern band that's not immediately racing to fit into a flavor of the week genre, be it neo-garage, emo, and whatnot. They're good for a listen every now and then – assuming you've lost your Gin Blossoms CDs.

johannsface.com

Aaron Passman

***SOS* "A Guide to Better Living"**
My guide: more vegetables, exercise, surf, avoid shitbag music.

***Daphne Loves Derby* "On the Strength of all Convicted"**
Daphne's a slut. Seriously, she told me she loved me last week and I saw her kissing Peter after school. Play young songs faster and you might not suck.

***Eric Haydocy Band* "Next Guy in Line"**
Eric's friends really need to take him aside and have a little intervention cos this is damn embarrassing.

***George Sarah* "String Section"**
New contender for worst album ever. Sounds like, "Me Love you long time" only techno.

***Golden Chariots of Mars* "Self-Titled"**
Brown showers of my ass would sound better.

***Lindsey Yung* "Fusion"**
You look like Lucy Liu but sound like a dog's ass. Celion Dion, anyone?

***Junkload* "Self-Titled"**
Just when you think it can't get any worse, Junkload comes along. Sludge, sludge, sludge.

***Dreamchild* "Lullabies for the Dead"**
Fake scary music that is really just two old hippies who have played too much D&D.

***Mirror Theory* "The Difference"**
Seriously, why keep trying? Why bother? Give up. Quit. Stop.

***HeadQuarters* "Get Your Head On"**
Inventive and upbeat rocktronica. Worth a listen.
hqmusic.net

***Kate Tucker* "Eros Turannos"**
Kate is really hot and therefore I recommend her CD unequivocally. She is a moody, atmospheric, guitar-driven chick that sounds like Jewel, which works for me.
katetucker.net

***Cats+Jammers* "Propose Toast"**
How can you put out a Greatest Hits album when you've had no good songs? Jesus.

***Shelly Bhushan* "The Shelly Show"**
I'm predisposed to like anything with the word "Shelly" in it, but this bites the big one.

***Blei* "In Day as Dark"**
I love it when these ass bands switch words around in their title to throw people off the scent that they suck. Nice try, suckers.

***Army of Robots* "Secret to Everybody"**
The artwork here is a total Ed Templeton rip-off. Toy Machine lawyers attack! Not a bad album though. Phoenix is coming up.

***The Concaves* "Warning, Heavy Surf Advisory"**
You can never go wrong with surf music. Not that this is great or anything but it's not bad either.

***Move Star Kiss* "Starting Over"**
How about doing us all a favor and never starting at all?

***Chris Thayer* "Chasing Venus"**
Nice work, Chris - you can blend the sleazy ballad with some rockabilly and a nice voice. You win the good job award for today.
christhayer.com

***Why Things Burn* "Your Flowers EP"**
Dancetronica that is supposed to be ominous but is instead just retarded. Have fun living in the landfill.

***Lovewhip* "Virtual Booty Machine"**
Oh, good, a virtual booty machine cos my real one was on its last leg. If you like Devo (and who doesn't?!?!?) then you'll love this. Get bent and kill yourself.

***DeNunzio* "Continuous Vaudeville"**
Whatever, I'm running out of jokes at this point and pretty much need to eat a burrito.

***Matt Costa* "Songs We Sing"**
Correction Matt, songs YOU sing. I would never sing this crap.

***God or Julie* "What Doesn't Kill You"**
Yeah…do I want the supreme all powerful being of the entire universe or that girl that sits in front of me in Math?...tough call…I'm going with...um, uh, the burrito, I guess.

Rosetta West
X Defendant
(Alive)

"X Defendant"'s cover art advertises it as "savage and psychedelic blues," and that's about the most accurate description that could be given for this record. Like a low-rent Queens Of The Stone Age, Rosetta West are bluesy, riff-based, guitar-centric rock n' roll. Vocalist/guitarist Joseph Demagore is clearly the star of the show here, and his rough voice fits with the band's raw, bluesy sound. By the end of the disc (if you make it that far) it's all largely faded together, but if nothing else, all things considered it's still a good record for getting stoned and playing very loud.
alive-totalenergy.com

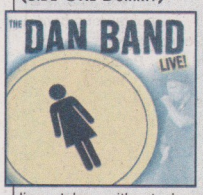
Aaron Passman

The Banner
Each Breath Haunted
(Ferret)

Although The Banner might have originated only blocks away from emo heartthrobs My Chemical Romance, their music is the farthest thing from pop/punk/emo. With a sound heavily rooted in hardcore with obvious metallic overtones, The Banner are like being assaulted by the frenzied attack of Suicidal Tendencies and the sonic brutality of Dillinger Escape Plan at the same time. Vocalist Joey Southside sounds like he's on the verge of a violent breakdown as he ferociously screams his way through the albums 13 tracks. While the album is a pretty solid effort, it does show signs of wear as it moves towards the finish line, as the songwriting starts to sound a bit formulaic. Other than that, The Banner is good, solid hardcore fun.
thebannernj.com

James Wright

The Dan Band
The Dan Band Live!
(Side One Dummy)



You might remember The Dan Band from the movie "Old School" with its profanity-laced rendition of "Total Eclipse of the Heart." What started as a gimmick has turned into not only a proper band but also a full-on stage show. This album captures The Dan Band live, doing very feminine songs in over-the-top masculine styles, without changing any lyrics. One can't help but laugh as the singer muscles his way through Kelis' "Milkshake," En Vogue's "Whatta Man," and the delightfully toxic medley of Christina Aguilera's "Genie in a Bottle" and Britney Spears' "Slave 4 U." The live show has choreography and on-stage shenanigans, so this CD has a bit of a "you had to have been there" vibe.
thedanband.com

Cosmo Lee

The Time Flys
Fly
(Birdman)

Am I the only one tired of the fake retro sound? The Time Flys obviously aren't, as the late 70s are alive and well in their sound, even if the members were all approximately negative eight years old when the bands they're channeling last played. How do these kids get their hands on this stuff? Were their parents into the Buzzcocks and left a few LPs laying around? "Fly" is succinct and to the point, overly heavy on the distortion but the attitude is right, even if the ages aren't. While far from being anything you'll want to give extended listening to, "Fly" is timeless in its own way and definitely a worthy first effort.
thebirdmangroup.com

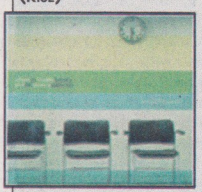
Brian Greenaway

Rotersand
Welcome to Goodbye
(Metropolis)

Don't judge this book by its cover. The simple, cheap artwork suggests old school techno or maybe Nitzer Ebb, but this album is an impressively diverse set of dancefloor industrial. Rotersand combines all sorts of influences - trance, techno (both old school and new school), futurepop, and even a bit of Pink Floyd. The production isn't earth-shattering, but it does the job nicely. There's the requisite stompers, like "The Last Ship Pt. 1" and "Storm," but there's also the pretty, Pet Shop Boys-esque "Angels Falling" and the impossibly funky "Would You Buy This?" The answer is yes.
rotersand.net

Cosmo Lee

A Fall Farewell
Where Us Trouble Befalls and the Secrecy Enthralls
(Rise)



Coupling teenage diary lyrical content with the bland and uninspired delivery of their like-minded mall-punk brethren Thrice, A Fall Farewell comes short of providing anything innovative or new. The main problem on this record is that we have heard it all before: some parts from Atreyu, some from the Refused, others from Taken. A Fall Farewell doesn't seem to really own the music they play, it feels stiff and forced, and they are not skillful enough musicians yet for that stiffness to serve as a meritable trait.
afallfarewell.com

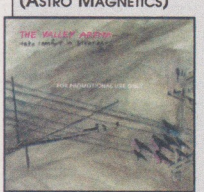
Dave Tow

This Moment
Finding a Voice in the Dark
(Uprising)

This Moment is one of the latest melodic hardcore bands to emerge from the Southern California scene. They primarily rely on the heavy-to-melodic dynamic in their songs, and it sounds exactly like it's supposed to. There is some pretty rocking stuff on here ("Reaction to Rejection," "Chasing Grey") and they are slightly heavier than most of their contemporaries, but it's so formulaic that it's hard to get too worked up about it. The songs have all the ingredients for them to be on Warped Tour next year.
thismomentmusic.com

Matt Walker

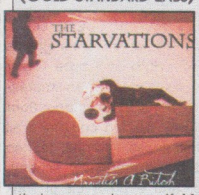
The Valley Arena
Take Comfort In Strangers
(Astro Magnetics)



Apparently these guys are supposed to sound like Fugazi/Q & Not U mixed with The Fall/The Cure/Talking Heads. That's a tall order, one they really can't fill. I (as a music critic & music snob) can appreciate what they are doing and their attempt is really quite noble. However, what it does come out sounding like is a lot of the dissonant elements we see in a lot of post/art-punk implemented into a pop-punk band. However, the guys in The Valley Arena play with passion and emotion, driving the dissonant sound of post punk head first into the brick wall of post-hardcore. Lyrically, The Valley Arena seems to be a bit more than standard fare; offering songs about lights and being alone, and other assorted post-hardcore symbolism but they take it further than most. These guys are headed in the right direction; I fully anticipate their next offering.
astromagnetics.com

Dave Tow

The Starvations
Gravity's A Bitch
(Gold Standard Labs)



Pirates? Martian-Irish drinking/crying songs? Mutant scurvy-rock? Regardless of the genre, GSL veterans The Starvations have gone absolutely wacky here. On their sixth proper album Gabriel Hart and company build visions of a world where gentlemen clad in black smoke pipe tobacco while stroking their pompadours. If Morrissey and Elvis were living in the 1600s and were under the command of the dread pirate Captain Johnny Cash, this is what music they would make. In a good way, trust me.

goldstandardlabs.com

Dave Tow

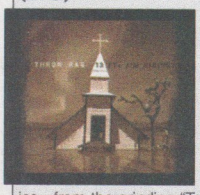
Flotsam and Jetsam
Dreams Of Death
(Crash)

20 years after their debut album, the Arizona thrash band Flotsam and Jetsam are still going strong. Their latest effort has plenty of old school thrash, but there are also a lot of progressive elements to the album including plenty of long instrumental passages and tempo changes. It's very diverse, with both speed metal and dark, atmospheric metal. They have taken elements from bands like Queensryche and bands like Metallica and created their own prog-thrash amalgamation.

flotsam-and-jetsam.com

Chad Bowar

Throw Rag
13 Ft. and Rising
(BYO)



There's really no good way to categorize an album like "Rising" or a band like Throw Rag. Fans of their previous releases will no doubt recognize the boozy, psychobilly elements that have made them famous within the whiskey and speed circles. That said, "Rising" doesn't just touch on the same old musical topics—from the grinding "Tonight the Bottle Let Me Down" to the speedy, methed-out "Swingset Superman" Throw Rag jump from sub-genre to sub-genre without skipping a beat. And let's not forget Jocko and his virtuoso washboard stylings. Yeah, that's right—if you've never heard them before then "Rising" is worth picking up just for the washboard solos, they're pretty sick. While it's not as unique and exciting as it was three albums ago, it's still pretty cool.

throwrag.com

Brian Greenaway

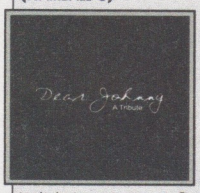
Benoit Pioulard
Enge EP
(Moodgadget)

Benoit Pioulard is not a real person. That is, to say, that he is actually someone else. Benoit Pioulard is Thomas Meluch, head of music label Ghostly International. Meluch uses his alias (and the imprint 'Moodgadget;' an offshoot of international collective Atmosphere) to make a departure from the primarily electronic scope of his label to 'experiment' with more analogue sounds as Pioulard. Pioulard here makes haunting and sparse arrangements in which one realizes how fragile music is. Accompanied with breathy, whispering vocals are miles of layered field recordings, small electronic sounds and softly strummed guitars. Meluch produces music with as much innovation and tenacity to give the likes of Iron & Wine, Pedro the Lion, and Mark Kozelek a run for their money. Many people will not like this though, they will call it too quiet or too simple or maybe even too easy. Fortunately, those people are wrong, this music is hypnotic, beautiful and immensely complex.

pioulard.com

Dave Tow

Various Artists
Dear Johnny: A Tribute to CASH
(Hairball 8)

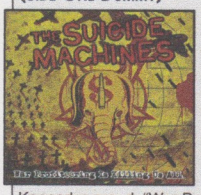


Now that the Man in Black has left us, "Dear Johnny:" is probably the first in a long line of Cash tributes. Mixed feelings on that, since it's difficult to cover such an influential artist and do him justice. Some of the bands on here (Supersuckers and Eddie Spaghetti, Hot Rod Lincoln, Deadbolt) are up to the task, but most are not. Sadly, Christ on a Crutch's excellent mid-'90s version of "Folsom Prison Blues" wasn't included. Instead we get a lackluster version from Stevie Tombstone. That's right. Who?

hairball8.com

Jason Schreurs

The Suicide Machines
War Profiteering Is Killing Us
(Side One Dummy)



There is one good thing about the reign of George W. Bush, he fueled the fire for some of the best punk rock to come out since the early '80s. Punk rock veterans The Suicide Machines have taken their ska meets energetic punk rock sound and fused it with a political fire that would make the Dead Kennedys proud. "War Profiteering Is Killing Us" kicks into high gear immediately with Refused like aggression on the album's opening title track. Frontman Jason Navarro rages about poor youth voter turn out on "17% 18 to 25", then switches into an engaging mouth-watering melodic ska delivery for "Junk". If you were a fan of The Suicide Machines and you left the fold, this is one of the band's best records in years that will make you rediscover a great band.

suicide-machines.com

James Wright

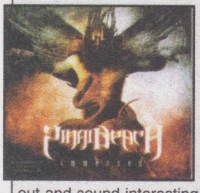
Throwdown
Vendetta
(Trustkill)

Something must have gotten into Throwdown because "Vendetta" is a fucking deadly slab of fawking hardcore metal. Sounding like a charged up version of Pantera circa "Cowboys From Hell" era', "Vendetta" is a powerful and commanding exercise in destructive riffage and deafening breakdowns. Vocalist Dave Peters sounds like a young Phil Anselmo, as he belts of some vicious screams along with his self-empowering lyrics. "Burn" is without a doubt the best Throwdown song ever committed to tape with a solid guitar hook and infectious chorus. This is without a doubt Throwdown's best release to date and one that will see them survive the gluttony that is metalcore.

throwdowngo.com

James Wright

Sinai Beach
Immersed
(Victory)



Wow, after reviewing so many shitty metalcore bands that I almost forgot hardcore and metal can be mixed together and still sound good. Southern California's Sinai Beach might be sonically pummeling ala Poison The Well, but they do manage to take their fair share of chances on this disc to make it stand out and sound interesting. Vocalist CJ Anderson is undoubtedly the band's secret weapon with vocals that are like a cross between Hatebreed's Jamey Jasta and Strife's Rick Rodney, but with the ability to do these amazing melodies. With the majority of hardcore bands flogging a dead horse, Sinai Beach mix in elements from metal, hard rock and European bands to make for one hell of a listen. This is without a doubt one of the most powerful hardcore records of 2005.

sinaibeach.net

James Wright

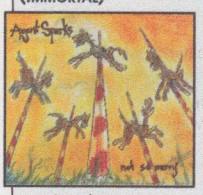
The Wednesdays
Invisible Youth
(Thorp)

If I were a smarter man I'd get some sort of patent on unclaimed bands named after days of the week. Then, when some act wanting to call themselves the Fridays (you know they're out there somewhere) comes along, they'd have to pay me massive royalties. I would however, give the Wednesdays free use of the name—they kick so much ass I'd be ashamed to have them pay me at all. "Invisible Youth" doesn't play like another throwback, rawk album, nor does it sound like a whiney, indie hodgepodge of sadness. Instead, the Wednesdays are able to take several different sounds and balance them together in a way that is both surprisingly unique and quite varied texturally. There are a few mildly successful keyboard moments, an acoustic ballad, and lots of swagger...this is a band with a lot of promise and they deserve to be heard. By you. Now.

thorprecords.com

Brian Greenaway

Agent Sparks
Not So Merry EP
(Immortal)



The bombastic guitar work and the quasi-theatrics of the music bring to mind southern California music circa '98. They also implement the singsong characteristics of Rilo Kiley or if the popiness of Pretty Girls if they toned the aggression down. This is L.A. indie pop at its peak.

agentsparks.com

Dave Tow

Duplex!
Ablum
(Mint)

Duplex! is made up of, I can't even tell, ten or twelve little kids (ages three to twelve, I'd guess) plus assorted parents, making "Ablum" probably the most bizarre kids' record of all time, as evidenced by tracks such as "Pooing and Peeing" and "Yr Mama". The music is somewhere between Mr. Rogers and everyone's favorite molester Raffi, with lots of xylophones and silly little piano pieces. You know Michael Jackson would love to have produced this one. So yeah, this is weird, maybe if you have kids you'd want it.

mintrecs.com

Brian Greenaway

Brain Failure
American Dreamer
(Thorp)

The only real dream for these Japanese punkers is that they actually get someone to translate their lyrics into something other than the gibberish they ended up with. It's funny I was sent this album this month, as a buddy of mine in Japan actually sent me some lyrics by a band there that they were hoping he'd be able to translate but they read like this: "Break a nightmare off! Get up! Fight! What am I giving?" And shit like that is hard to make sense out of. These bastards don't have much of a chance either. With titles like, "Holly Bullshit" and "Listen to My Back" you know you're in for generic Gilman-sounding punk with laughable translations. My favorite is probably "One guy says he has another brother/ Been 5 years in jail and 2 years junk/ He's clean now but what he gonna do". Classic. If you're looking for more than cheap chords and snotty, garbled lyrics (and I hope you are), then keep looking. And I'd also like to recommend www.engrish.com.

thorprecords.com

Brian Greenaway

Lowlight **"Self-Titled"**
Yawn, burp, repeat.

The Coyotes **"Self-Titled EP"**
Too much time listening to the Doors, not enough time rocking the house.

Fly By Night **"Self-Titled"**
Suck by day. Just kidding, these little kids are on par with Hot Rod Circuit.
flybynightmusic.com

Careen **"Crash Couture"**
What does couture mean? I'm always too embarrassed to ask. If it means halfway decent rock with weak vocals then I got it figured out. If not, please let me know.

Victory Garden **"Self-Titled"**
Trippy and spaced out rock that would sound good around a campfire.

Mussels **"Night Lights"**
The Mussels pretty much go off - angular guitars, haunting vocals, good hooks.
musselsmusic.com

Christopher Cash **"Hollywood Mirage"**
Yeah, I know! I'll name myself Cash, cos nobody has done that before! I'll be huge! Huge, I tells ya!

Billy Brush **"Liar"**
See above for what you should call someone if they tell you this is a good CD.

The Raven Masters **"The Tragedy of the Commons"**
The tragedy of wasted time, more like it. Like really bad U2, which is already bad enough.

Courtesy Blush **"Sweet Modern Fairy Tales"**
Mathy emo - nice work fellas, you impressed me and I'm obviously a jerk.

The Dead Betties **"Summer of 93"**
Ah yes, the good old days of '93, before I'd heard this excuse for an album and all was right with the world...

Hammock **"Stranded Under Endless Sky"**
How can you not want to put the word 'Banana' before Hammock? Either way this thing is miserable.

Thomas Cunningham & The Locofocos **"Swell"**
I'm down for anything that is a reference to surfing, so this is cool. Sort of John Mayerish or however you spell that guy's name.
thomas-cunningham.com

I am Electric **"Self-Titled"**
Electric, acoustic, unplugged, call it what you will; anyway you slice it, it still blows.

Dirty on Purpose **"Sleep Late for a Better Tomorrow"**
Poor man/woman's Rilo Kiley. Really, really poor man/woman's...

Healthy White Baby **"Self-Titled"**
This baby is going to get dumped into a trashcan.

The Sewing Circle Sues **"Self-Titled"**
This CD is the opposite of a good time. It is the opposite of fun, enjoyable and entertaining.

Stiffed **"Burned Again"**
Burned again? Do you know how many freaking times I've been burned by these CDs? Like ten billion and counting.

Kaura **"Self-Titled"**
Gothy 3 Doors down, if you can even imagine something that bad.

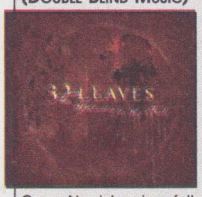
The Unheard Of **"The Struggle"**
Unheard of for a reason with this sludgy mix of cock-rock and Alice in Chains.

The Last Man of the 9th Michigan Infantry **"Read Read Red"**
All five tracks start exactly the same. Michigan sucks.

Kandy Whales **"Self-Titled"**
Whales eat plankton, this one feeds on your brain cells and leaves you dumber.

Lydia **"This December; It's One More and I'm Free"**
You should be free every month of the year 'cos nobody is ever going to buy this crap.

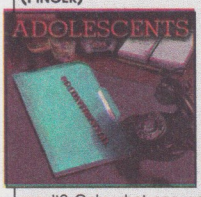
32 Leaves
Welcome To The Fall
(Double Blind Music)



Although they may have a name that invokes images of goth bands crooning about pain and suffering, 32 Leaves is more in line with the melodic rock you hear on most rock stations. Their sound is in the realm of 10 Years or 3 Days Grace, but with a little more substance than most generic radio rockers. Vocalist Greg Norris' voice falls somewhere in between Maynard Keenan (Tool) and Pete Murray (Lo-Pro), so he has some pipes. "Welcome To The Fall" is a solid first effort from a band that is obviously developing their sound into something very powerful.
32Leaves.com

James Wright

Adolescents
OC Confidential
(Finger)



The first new Adolescents album in two decades is going to hold a lot of weight and/or anticipation. But we all knew it was coming, seeing as this seminal punk outfit couldn't stay down and had their reunion show a few years back. Well, now they've managed to throw a dozen songs together and put them out. The result? Only what one would expect: that sort of slightly more laidback Descendants-esque vibe with a touch of Social Distortion coolness. Naturally this release won't hold the weight of their earlier works, but when compared not only to the new breed of punk goons as well as the waste most of their contemporaries are putting out, one can't help but love "OC Confidential".
theadolescents.net

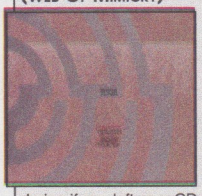
Keith Carman

Anti-Social Music
Sings the Great American Songbook
(Peacock)

Want to hear some of your not-so-all-time-favorite-musicians (a real bunch of B listers: the Hold Steady, Ida, Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Elliot Sharp, Gang Gang Dance, etc.) drop their punk rock pretenses and play chamber music? Yeah, didn't think so. But in case you did, you could totally listen to them here. This presents an interesting dilemma for The Reviewer (myself), as he has (to his best recollection) never heard chamber music before, and perhaps also never even been in a chamber of any sort at all. How then, does one compare/contrast this chamber album to others? Hopefully, one doesn't, as this is his presumably first and last foray into adult contemporary chamber music. Say what you will, but this sort of stuff is goddamn lame in recording...maybe if it was live and in the background of a Cirque du Soleil show it'd be alright but blaring out of your computer it's pretty whack. Unless your computer is in a chamber.
antisocialmusic.org

Brian Greenaway

Asya
Futurists Against The Ocean
(Web Of Mimicry)



Sludge metal has entered a new era. This album has four tracks and still clocks in at over 50 minutes. How on earth any band could manage to produce a song that is 15 minutes long and consists solely of whole note hits that last for an average of five seconds per hit is beyond me. Trying to listen to it is like wondering if you left your CD player on 331/3 while the disc should be at 78. This is the kind of music where the space between the notes is supposed to say more. Unfortunately for me, thanks to the absolute lack of rhythm or groove, those spaces are saying, "Shut me off".
webofmimicry.com

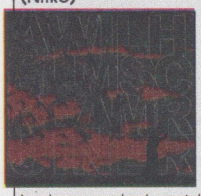
Keith Carman

Achilles
The Dark Horse
(Hex)

Hopefully Achilles' latest effort will attract more exposure than its name implies. "The Dark Horse" is overflowing with walls of mathy guitar riffs that flow so perfectly with the off-beat drum rhythms that it is as if they are one and the same. Vocally, the imagery is the usual strained vocal chords struggling to not run dry, but in this case a brutal consistency is found in their desperation. There are no shortages of creative fills or clever mood shifts, best experienced at the start of the title track "The Dark Horse". As a whole, Achilles springs from the same family tree as prog-metalheads Every Time I Die and though this effort may not be groundbreaking, it surely can cement Achilles some breathing room among the masses.
achillesband.com

Campbell

A Wilhelm Scream
Ruiner
(Nitro)



Even though they are falling straight into that emo/prog-punk category a lot of bands seem to be diving towards these days, A Wilhelm Scream are so spot-on, they don't even bounce against any walls...bull's-eye!. "Ruiner" almost seems like self-fulfilling prophecy. The sporadic move between direct hardcore, pop/rock, metal and ballad before the end of the first song is not only the product of ADD, but it's annoying as you can never fall into a groove. Overall, the musicianship here could blow minds. Technicality meets with artistry in ways that most bands dream of dreaming of. It's just too bad that they can't relax enough to let any one particular element breathe for a second.
nitrorecords.com

Keith Carman

Cheap Sex
Headed For A Breakdown
(Punk Core)

While the themes aren't anything extraordinary, one must admit that the street punk of Cheap Sex is a decidedly cool thing. From attacking society for its laziness and lethargy to pointing out how we all just end up taking shit out on one another instead of helping those who need it, it's a direct message that we need to look at ourselves and smarten up. Heightening the message is the raucous four-chord punk that comes as fast and furious as a kamikaze and could give their closest competitors The Casualties a run for their money. Or maybe the kid with the squeegee on the highway cutoff for that matter. Passionate, furious, pointed and still managing to rip out some memorable riffs, "Headed For A Breakdown" proves that some bands can still blend message with muscle.
punkcore.com

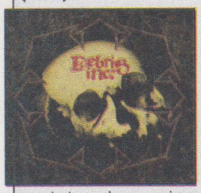
Keith Carman

Alternative Champs
Welcome To Fort Awesome
(MoRisen)

Goofy alt-rock is probably be the best description of Alternative Champs. Their lyrics are very tongue in cheek with song titles like "Set Your Face On Fire", "The Greatest Song In The World" and "Shaquille", which is about the basketball player Shaquille O'Neal. But because they're goofy doesn't mean they don't have talent. The songs are very catchy and the musicianship is excellent. The songs are poppy with some R&B influences and falsetto vocals mixed in. It's an entertaining album. The music is good and the lyrics will make you laugh.
alternativechamps.com

Chad Bowar

Debris Inc.
Self-Titled
(Indie)



Comprised of former St. Vitus alumni Dave Chandler and Trouble bassist Ron Holzner, Debris Inc. has the setting for one fucker of a release. Things start off on a terrible note though as throw-away track, "Too Many Mushrooms On My Pizza" is really just a bunch of messing around and smashing instruments to make a sonic mess. It's more annoying than anything and means that anytime anyone is to put the disc on, they're forced to reach for the skip button. Then again, after hearing the remaining 16 tracks, that'll probably be only once. This sounds like the worst possible Dayglo Abortions songs that were actually thrown away...as interpreted by gutter punks with nothing but borrowed equipment and three days of rehearsals under their belt. Basically every band you were in during high school. The second track title says it all: "Fuckin' Mess." How sad.
debrisinc.com

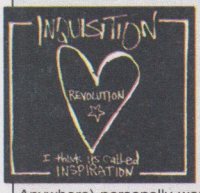
Keith Carman

I Farm
So My Kids Won't Have To
(Blackout!)

Seems like their hyperactive mixture of fast pop-punk and hardcore should be just what the doctor ordered, but it always comes across about as endearing as a bratty little kid with cheese doodle dust on his lips and a gleam in his eye for bugging the shit out of you. Too many ideas in each song, waaaay too many vocals screaming out of both channels, and samples between songs that, instead of adding to the experience, only serve to grate even further. Someone, somewhere likes this band. And I'm stoked for them. Truly, I am. As long as I don't have to listen to I Farm, and someone else does, I'm happy.
ifarmrock.com

Jason Schreurs

Inquisition
Revolution...I Think It's Called Inspiration
(A-F)



Foreshadowing to a more modern punk rock scene, this is truly a major landmark in punk's history. If not a landmark, then at least a fruitful tree that yielded future members of Ann Beretta, River City High and Strike Anywhere. This re-issue has been attempted in the past, but this time singer Thomas Barnett (Strike Anywhere) personally worked with A-F Records to produce an album that stays true to its original design and also offers original artwork, handwritten lyrics and notes. Musically, despite their underground status outside of their extremely loyal followers, Inquisition has had an impact on the tastes of countless bands that came after them, including Hot Water Music, the Suicide Machines and Avail. A poppy blend of nostalgic punk rock layered with the rough, smart and melodic vocals of Barnett truly allow the listener to see each member's contribution to Inquisition's overall sound. Picture Ann Beretta's guitar-heavy rock and Strike Anywhere's socio-political lyrics via the energy and spirit of rough, honest punk rock.
a-frecords.com

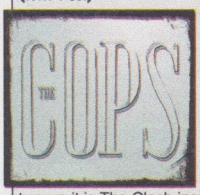
Campbell

Crash and Burn
The value of Mistrust
(Thorp)

It's interesting to see hardcore kids grow up. There are so many paths they can take musically. Crash and Burn are obviously from Boston, and most likely grew up listening to hardcore. With "The Value of Mistrust" (Thorp) they mix Boston tough-guy punk with fast rock n'roll the likes of Motorhead and Zeke. Crash and Burn play fast and fierce punk n' roll that will make hardcore kids want to grow their hair long and wear leather.
crashandburn1.com

Gabe Abaud

The Cops
Get Good or Stay Bad
(Mt. Fuji)



With a resume that starts at the top from day one (their first show was opening for The Walkmen) and only goes up from there (they toured with The Hold Steady) you know there has to be something special about The Cops. But what is it? Their boyish looks? Catchy hooks? The way they read so many books? I'm pretty sure it is The Clash inspired guitar driven rock that is breathing new life back into the Seattle (and the U.S. for that matter) punk scene. By the falsetto "who who who" of "Controller" I'm already dreading the end of the CD. It isn't crap punk by Seattle musicians hoping to be the next big thing; this is rock for people who wear dorky glasses to look more like Elvis Costello, or for people who still listen to "London Calling" on a regular basis. "Get Good or Stay Bad" is the gravelly punk album everyone has been waiting for. Who knew getting arrested could be this good (I know I'm lame, but their name just begs for catchy police references...)
thecopsmusic.com

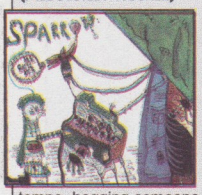
Pete Soyer

Leng Tche
The Process of Elimination
(Relapse)

Grindcore mixed with some hardcore, but don't go thinking of Carcass. Well, maybe you can go thinking of Carcass's first album, but don't go thinking of any of their later ones unless you want to go thinking about music better than this steaming cupful of fresh squeezed ass juice. "This CD contains copy-protection technology. Any attempt to copy this product may result in damage to your audio or computer equipment. Relapse Records, Inc. and its licensees and distributors are not liable for any damage that may result from such actions." Whoever thought so much time and legal energy went into protecting ass juice, and DUH! Of course dumping ass juice all over your audio or computer equipment will result in damage. We're not children. We know better. Look for Leng Tche, coming to fine 99 Cent cut-out bargain bins across the nation.
relapse.com

DICK

Sparrow
The Early Years
(Absolutely Kosher)



Early adolescent dances with boys on one side and girls on the other are soon to be a distant spot in our memories. Sparrow opens "The Early Years" with a track destined to make young kids swoon together while waltzing like they never knew they could. "Flower" opens with a trumpet swaying above a waltz tempo, begging someone to dance. Jason Zumpano has mastered the art of pop and thrown it through his own processor so it comes out the other end sounding like he kicked the shit out of Teenage Fanclub, The Shins and The Kinks. The title track is perfect for those Saturday mornings when you are sitting with a bowl of cheerios playing Super Mario Bros. 3 on your vintage NES. The downward progression of Zumpano's vocals lead into a Beach Boy chorus before blasting off with enough pop to carry you and all your pop happy friends with it.
inflightmusic.com

Pete Soyer

Serengeti
Gasoline Rainbows
(Day By Day)

People have been making efforts into trying to combine hip hop with other genres with limited success. Mos Def tried last year with "New Danger" with mixed results and mixed reviews. Chicago born Serengeti doesn't do a bad job on Gasoline Rainbows as he offers up his socio political commentary in a poetic and abstractive way. His use of guitars goes well with the majority of the songs and he is helped out as well by former drummer from Local H Jeff Daniels. Serengeti's message may not always be crystal clear, but he wants us to understand things from the way he sees it. This album doesn't hit you over the head with heavy beats, but is melodic in a way that makes the rhyming the main focus. His rhyming is not your typical, but Serengeti has just enough conviction to make you listen. For an album five years in the making and written all over parts of the world one might expect a little more, but "Gasoline Rainbows" does not make for a bad listen.
daybydayrecordings.com

TRizzo

Drowningman
Don't Push Us When We're Hot
(Thorp)

Much fuss has been made about the production values and songwriting on the new CD by Vermont's Drowningman, a band who helped to purvey the tech/metalcore scene and then disappeared for a number of years while bands like Converge and Dillinger Escape Plan wrecked havoc on underground music. Well, now Drowningman are back... and, yes, this new album is not quite the same as their earlier material, but that doesn't mean the band has run out of ideas or is any less musical on "Don't Push Us When We're Hot". The obvious sacrifice here is the power in their sound; the production job doesn't quite lend itself to the punchier moments in the songs. Imagine what it might have sounded like if someone like Zeuss was twiddling the knobs. No one needs to hear another band who sounds like that. Drowningman tread in a more emotional territory here, sort of a combo of late-90s emo-core and Converge-style screaminess. No pretense, no girls with fangs on their CD cover, just honest, emotional hardcore with bouts of welcome spazzery.
drowningmanisnotyourbabydaddy.com

Jason Schreurs

Persona **"Hard-work for Hang-Ups"**
This one has more hang-ups than a telemarketing company. No, no wait - more hang-ups than your shrink's couch. No, wait…this sucks.

Disclaimer **"The Airbag's Lipstick Kiss"**
I would love to pretend that I've never heard of this CD ever. I will now try to erase it from my mind…nope, shit, can't do it.

Timmy Fields **"Self-Titled"**
Shoot, I was all set to make fun of this guy cos of his retarded album art but he's actually a really good singer. Too bad, cos I had some funny stuff to say.

Children of the Risk **"Solution X"**
Shit, Solutions I-IX didn't turn out too good either I'm sure.

Shots Fired **"Self-Titled"**
Why do it to yourself? You are an embarrassment.

Why?Things Burn **"Your Flowers EP"**
Dude, I didn't ask for your damn flowers or your cheesyass synthesizers, either.

Lene Lovich **"Shadows and Dust"**
Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

Instant Camera **"Alive on Departure"**
Instant Camera! Just add water, stir and you're got yourself a total piece of shit!

Michael Shapiro **"Somehow, Someway"**
Somehow, someway you'll make a good CD. But this is not it. Hang your head in shame.

Situation Nowhere **"One of the Loudest Tragedies Ever Heard…"**
Loud? Not really. Tragedy? Of Hindenburg proportions.

Mezklah **"Spider Monkey"**
Yeah…not really sure what this is…don't want to look too closely either.

Gliss **"Halfway Gone"**
Nope, all the way gone. There's no halfway about this garbage.

Good Evening **"I Saw the Sun Explode"**
And all I got was this stupid CD.

Andi Camp **"Magnetic"**
This chick pretty much goes off. And there's also a magnetic seal on the album. Dope.

Loud DeAdder **"LouD"**
No, that's not a typo, it's on purpose and it doesn't make the CD any better sadly.

Public Access **"Fleeced"**
Straight up punk rock. Gotta like this or else you're an idiot.
we-don't-suck.com

Blood Haven **"Religious Suffocation"**
Grrrowwwl…we're so tough….grrrr, churches make me mad…grrrrrr, I sound like a dog…grrrrrroowwlllll…angry at churches…grrrr….so tough….grrr…churches…

Demander **"Self-Titled"**
You are lame. And your album art is scaring me. Please make it stop.

Forgotten Day **"Goodbye for the Last Time"**
The last time? I don't think I'm that lucky.

Benny Girl **"Self-Titled"**
There is a line that goes, "When you say, you moaned when I went away". No joke. And it starts off the song, like that's an attention grabber.

Hulda **"Forest of the Night"**
Hulda sounds like the name of a fat chick, not a cock rock band.

P.J. Olsson **"Beautifully Insane"**
Less of the beautiful, more of the insane. Not like the good kind of insane, but the kind that makes you wish you were dead.

Century **"Self-Titled"**
Only one more CD to go and then I get to dump this box into the trash. That's a good feeling.

Jamie Gazelle **"Holy Dementia"**
Holy shit! Over 80 CDs and this is probably the worst of the bunch. Until next time bitches…

The Jonbenet
The Plot Thickens
(Pluto)

I'm too emotionally drained to go into the ramifications of naming your band after a murdered six-year-old beauty queen. Less Blood Brothers worship and more unexpected music direction (parts of the album range from backwoods sludge rock to almost dance clubish sound) and methinks we'd have a winner.

thejonbenet.com

Jason Schreurs

The Rosebuds
Birds Make Good Neighbors
(Merge)

Like flowers in spring time, The Rosebuds are all about making you happy. With their major key loving songs and soft vocals caressing your ear lobes, they'll make their way into your pants in no time. And who doesn't want a married couple in your pants? Ivan Howard and Kelly Crisp make up the The Rosebuds and The Rosebuds make up their marriage. Using a drum machine and a host of musically capable friends they have been able to churn out sweet and somber pop consistently since their honeymoon. "Birds Make Good Neighbors" is pop the way it was meant to be. It doesn't push to hard, is understated where needed, makes you happy, makes you sad, but in the end makes you want to listen again.

therosebuds.com

Pete Soyer

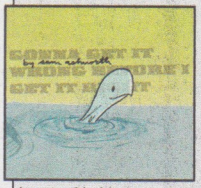
Longwave
There's a Fire
(RCA)

These guys are some Brit-rockers, sort of similar to The Thrills, with more down-tempo moments, which is really too bad because they're at their best when they're jamming and freewheeling. Even when they slow things down, as in "Underworld", Longwave still manages to make the listener stop and take note with their atmospheric underpinnings and moody sounds. Still though, it's the catchy as hell tracks like "Tell Me I'm Wrong" that really make this one worth recommending, poppy and sugary but still strong enough to stick with you. The piano driven, "The Flood" is also highly recommended, as it blends elements of Ben Folds and the softness of Jim Croche. Pretty cool.

longwavetheband.com

Brian Greenaway

Sam Ashworth
Gonna Get It Wrong Before I Get It Right
(Runway Network)

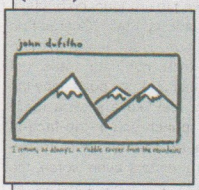


Sam Ashworth will steal your girlfriend, unless you have a shaggy head of hair, play guitar and sing in a whisper strong enough to unbutton pants. Ashworth's solo debut is filled with his Nashville inspired blend of mellow indie-pop. On the barely there "Children Leap" Ashworth is driving straight for your girlfriend's heart with his twanged voice and rolling acoustic guitar. He knows how to spice it up enough to get your girlfriend's ass shaking too. On "Dirty Walk" Ashworth pushes things forward enough to make the feet start tapping. But with all his soothing songs and ass shakers, I feel like Ashworth is hiding something. His door is only cracked open so you can peak inside, but Mr. Sam hasn't invited you completely in yet. That works to his advantage as you (or your girlfriend) is left wanting more from him even though "Gonna Get It Wrong Before I Get It Right" packs plenty to keep you filled for quite awhile.

samashworth.com

Pete Soyer

John Dufilho
I Remain, As Always, A Rabble Rouser From the Mountains
(Glurp)



Hailing from Austin, the Deathray Davies' front man has taken a break to record his debut on Austin's own Glurp imprint. This album is kaleidoscopic in its scope of Dufilho's talents (and probably reflects his diverse influences as well). The album opener ("I'm Gonna Stay Under These Covers Today") is a kind of stripped down 'dude-with-guitar' track. However, along the way, we have clean pop tracks ("What are you Waiting For?'), Bright Eyes B-sides ("Nobody's Right-Nobody's Wrong"), lo-fi fragility ("Nate & Gray's Theme"), and sometimes some good old power pop ("I'm Outside"). There is absolutely no reason why everyone is not listening to John Dufilho. He is quite possible one of the most talented independent musicians producing work today.

glurp.com

Dave Tow

Orange
Welcome to the World of Orange
(Hellcat)

I hate it when kids in high school are more talented than I am. Luckily for me, it's a problem I'm so used to dealing with that it doesn't really depress me like it used to. Joe Denman, lead singer of Hollywood's Orange is one of those kids who just sounds good; it probably helps he was born in the UK , those kids always sound better recorded. The rest of Orange sounds equally good with big riffs a la Weezer and Social Distortion, making an album full of catchy hooks and backing vocals with a surprising amount of pathos thrown in. In fact, my only real complaint is a weird jingle-bell buzzing that pops up from time to time…someone twist a knob or something in the studio next time, huh?

hell-cat.com

Brian Greenaway

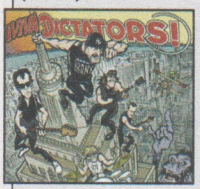
The Bellakun
Bendicion Maldita
(Has Anyone Ever Told You)

Riding the same mellow wave as The Rum Diary and DCFC, The Bellakun's "Bendicion Maldita" wines and dines the listener like a masseuse at a happy-endings parlor. "Can You Feel It?" sees the tempo speed up slightly, but the somberness holds on and keeps even a faster tempo feeling slow. The driving guitars are offset by the single note vocal extensions in one moment and in the next a keyboard chord is held against driving vocals. The Bellakun changes directions enough times to keep the listener interested, but they don't change so drastically that they lose the listener all together. "Bendicion Maldita" sticks to what it knows from the first to the last note and does it extremely well. You'll leave satisfied.

hasanyoneevertoldyou.com/bands/bellakun

Pete Soyer

The Dictators
Viva Dictators
(Escapi)

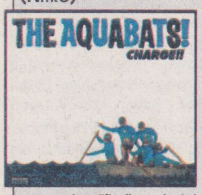


New York proto-punkers The Dictators have been around since 1974, although they broke up in the late '70s and didn't reunite until the early '90s. "Viva Dictators" is a live album featuring songs from the band's heyday in the late '70s along with a couple tracks from their 2001 album "D.F.F.D.". The sound quality is really good without losing the crowd noise. Their music is traditional punk with a metal edge full of singalong choruses and great energy.

thedictators.com

Chad Bowar

The Aquabats!
Charge!!
(Nitro)



Ska tends to confuse the reviewer, often leading to pronounced bouts of dizziness and apathy. "Charge!!" is no exception, containing thirteen tracks of mind numbing brass and Devo-ish beats. At no point does the album not feel like a joke; a really unfunny, punch-you-in-the-face-if-you-ever-try-to-wake-me-up-by-screaming-"fire"-again joke. To make matters even worse, the title of every track ends in an !, causing even more angst for my computer. The best song is probably "Fashion Zombies!", but only because it reminds me a little bit of the Misfits. If they were lame. And dressed like dorks.

theaquabats.com

Brian Greenaway

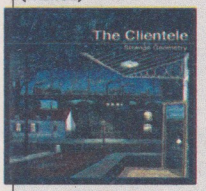
The Jim Yoshi Pile-Up
Picks Us Apart
(Absolutely Kosher)

The Jim Yoshi Pile-Up is an oddball name, but somehow it works for this Oakland based 5-piece (or 6-piece if you count their "spiritual advisor" as a member like it does on their website). "Heart My Home" is the standout track from this album, with a breezy acoustic guitar and stunning performance by vocalist Paul Gonzenbach. "Pick Us Apart" is a solid effort with a strong sense of songwriting that anyone can dig. With a sound that meets somewherebetween Death Cab for Cutie and the somber acoustics of Hayden, The Jim Yoshi Pile-Up will surely delight anyone who opts for soothing sounds.

jypu.net

James Wright

The Clientele
Strange Geometry
(Merge)



Has anyone put out a catchier song than "Since K Got Over Me"? It's like they knew exactly what part of my brain would react to this kind of fifties inspired pop and then drove a nail straight into it. The song ends and I restart it, then I restart it again. It reminds me of The Beatles, The Monkees ("Pleasant Valley Sunday-esque"), or The Byrds, but it feels new. The Clientele are known for shoving music's past through their new ideas and it has never come out quite as good as on "Strange Geometry." They throw their hair in the wind a couple times, but for the most part this is an album of tremolo guitar with an echo swarming around it like steam in a sauna. This is easily one of the best CD's of 2005 and probably 2006.

theclientele.co.uk

Pete Soyer

Capillary Action
Fragments
(Pangaea)

When was the last time you were in the mood for a little instrumental rock? Been a while, hasn't it? The last decent instrumental album I can remember was Elliot's "Song in the Air", which was sans vocals a good 95% of the time. Capillary Action take it a step further, and is comprised solely of Georgian Jonathan Pfeffer, who recorded virtually every instrument, then mastered the fragments (get it?) together to form this here record. What truly sets "Fragments" apart is without question its sheer diversity, as Pfeffer succeeds in playing every genre from acid jazz to metal to ambient punk, giving the album a textured, if imbalanced feel. Sure, you're going to have to be in a pretty weird mood to throw this one on the stereo, but you'll enjoy it when you do.

capillaryaction.net

Brian Greenaway

Odawas
The Aether Eater
(Jagjaguwar)

Interpreting Dante's Inferno is usually left to literary classes in college, not ambient indie CD's. But Odawas has created a sound that twists through more layers than the inferno will ever hope to have. "If It Smells Like a Rain Cloud" takes you into the final level of any obstacle where you finally have to face the beast, but there is no fear. Mike Tapscott is channeling Dante and the plight of the Odawas Indians for his songs on "The Aether Eater" and the moody ambient sounds create a soundscape fitting enough for death and banishment. His partner in this, Isaac Edwards, creates the random sounds that flesh out the scenery. From Mormon polygamists, to Indians fleeing to an island on Michigan Lake, to the screams heard from various rings in the Inferno, Odawas has bitten off a huge and complex chunk of inspiration to draw their music from and it couldn't be more perfect.

odawas.com

Pete Soyer

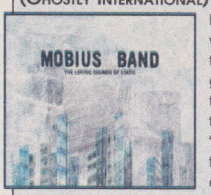
Stone Jack Jones
Bluefolk
(Fictitious)

Stone Jack Jones has quite a story behind him. His dad was a coal miner. His childhood was spent playing in a black creek and green forest behind his house. When he was rejected from the army due to epilepsy, his dad told him not to be a miner so he became a musician instead. Taking his childhood upbringing in WV, applying the DIY of punk and the spit-in-your-eye attitude of country, Jones played his violin and guitar anywhere he could. On "Bluefolk" he is still playing and has honed a sound that could only come from a WV coal miner's son who moved to Nashville to become a musician. It is dark, somber, filled with understated guitar and cloaked in more black than Johnny Cash. Patty Griffin even makes a couple appearances to help Jones along, but "Bluefolk" stands on its own as a great sophomore album. This coal miner's son will be a well-known musician anytime now.

stonejackjones.com

Pete Soyer

Mobius Band
The Loving Sounds of Static
(Ghostly International)



Mobius Band relies more on new-wave and electronic aspects but they don't hesitate to layer jangley guitars and emotional lyrics over the top. Everything fits together better than a Gibbard and Dntel sandwich. "Taxicab" sits smack in the middle of the disc and holds the climax that everyone is waiting for. They start with quiet guitars and slowly build into an explosive wall of sound. The only hint that things are about to change is a quiet electronic drum sending out a warning that you should probably duck. A soft hum runs under the entire song like a heater running in another room. You have to listen for it, otherwise it just blends in and keeps you warm. They have mastered the art of layering and thinning. They know when there needs to be three synth notes to flesh out a song, where a guitar part should be taken out and where a small drum hic-up will make the most impact.

mobiusband.com

Pete Soyer

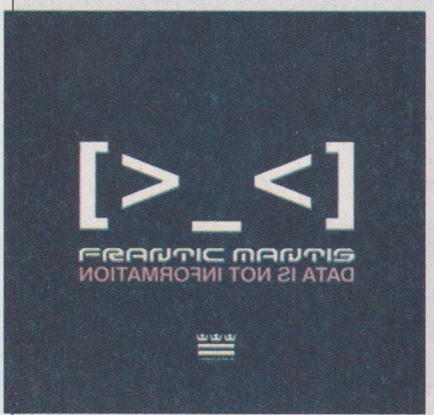
Velella Velella
The Bay of Biscay
(Big V)

Velella Velella want to make a mark that no one else has made, so they're pulling out flutes, vibraphones, synthesizers, organs and every percussion instrument they can get their hands on to create their funk-infused electro dance beats. "The Bay of Biscay" feels like the soundtrack to some club in San Francisco's downtown that I wouldn't be able to get into because my nicest pair of shoes are grey sneakers. But I can put this on in my living room, light some candles and sip gin while my hip friends walk around in the semi-darkness and talk about important things like Dolce and Gabbana or the latest trends in iPod cases. VV is definitely treading new ground and making a sound that is easy to listen to and easy to dance to, but they aren't trying to push anyone's limits. This is better left in the background for people to comment on rather than being played while driving to work and checking out girls while pretending to use the stair climber.

www.velella.net

Pete Soyer

Frantic Mantis
Data is Not Information
(Lujo)



With Per Stalberk and Hakan Johansson (Division of Laura Lee) and Shelby Cinca (Frodus) at the helm of Frantic Mantis, you know before the disc even starts that this shit is going to be good. With cues from Les Savy Fav and At the Drive-In, "Data is Not Information" feels the same as a truck slamming into you at 83 mph, except without the excessive injuries and possible death. From the first note of "Creation Sickness" to the last computer blip on ";ASJDF0OP45644564EJKGL;S3DJAG5" this disc divides its time by being a post-apocalyptic look at the world through the screen of a game boy and by being the most creative punk rock to fall out of Sweden's loins in a long time. Frantic Mantis have created their genre and named it datapunk. If your computer could pick up a guitar and turn all its garbled thoughts into rock, Frantic Mantis is who that little PC would sound like.

franticmantis.com

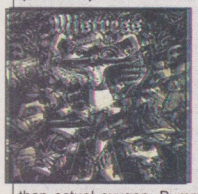
Pete Soyer

The Magnolia Electric Co
Hard to Love a Man EP
(Secretly Canadian)

Jason Molina has been playing his own brand of rock for long enough to know when it is time to slow down. "Hard to Love a Man EP" sees him taking a cue from Springsteen's "Nebraska" and Young's "Harvest". He's talking about the places he grew up, the places he misses, how he got to where he is, but he's singing all these songs from inside your bones. After he has a grip on you from the inside out, Molina lets his rock influences peek out on "Werewolves in London", only enough to let you know he is still holding all the cards. Recorded by Steve Albini, the raw power of this stripped EP can be felt long after it ends. Molina is proving that simple folk-rock can hit harder than the loudest of guitars and the heaviest of metal. "Hard to Love a Man EP" will make you believe that albums like "Nebraska" are still possible.
magnoliaelectricco.com

Pete Soyer

Mistress
In Disgust We Trust
(Earache)



Don't let the name fool you: this is not the raven-haired beauty you may be hoping for. No, what we've got here are five hairy dudes that can remember the better parts of Entombed albums, make you feel like the 20 years you spent learning guitar were a waste and probably ingest more cigarette smoke per day than actual oxygen. Pummeling death metal in the old school tradition (hence the Entombed reference) when black metal and piercing shrieks were naught, "In Disgust We Trust" is brutal in the most appealing sense of the word. From the guttural roar of the title track through furious and amazingly titled closer "Talking To God (on a Microphone Made of Steel)", they can be my Mistress anytime. Musically speaking.
earache.com

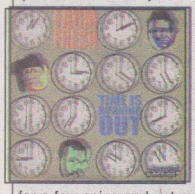
Keith Carman

Craig Wedren
Lapland
(Team Love)

Although you may think you know him from Shudder to Think or from Baby, "Lapland" is a side of Wedren you do not know. His bald head and pork chop sideburns are exposed for everyone to pick through and look at. The majority of the songs were either meant for Shudder to Think or for various films, but they all quietly ended up here. Like an orphanage, Lapland takes in everyone and gives them a bed. The ass shaking rock in Wedren's other projects is absent from Lapland. He instead drops falsettos and acoustic guitars on the listener like rain on a windshield. "Night is Over" sounds the way a highway looks when it stretches straight ahead as far as you can see. Wedren is inviting you in, letting you know his secrets and pulling out the air mattress for a sleep over.
craigwedren.com

Pete Soyer

Farm Fresh
Time Is Running Out
(Peanuts & Corn)



Brandon, Manitoba's Farm Fresh offer up some unconventional hip-hop on "Time Is Running Out". While their nasally raps about hockey, Mc Donald's, arcades and the Hudson Bay Stores is uniquely Canadian, it's a little hard to take this band seriously. Much like Tom Green's short lived rap career, Farm Fresh is good for a few spins and not much else. This is funky white-boy rap that sounds like a whack version of Corey and Trevor rapping with J-Roc down at his mom's trailer. Believe it moha-fuka.
peanutsandcorn.com

James Wright

Old Time Relijun
2012
(K)

Barbaric "Yawps" are littered throughout like Robin Williams' pouty frowns in Dead Poets Society. With a stand up bass, single chord guitar and steady-drip drums, Old Time Relijun is ready to take the dance circuit by storm. Legendary Beat Happening record label K was gracious enough to release this into the world so we may all hear Arrington de Dionyso's squeals, squirts and squelches in our very own home instead of driving all the way to some club to see a shirtless bearded man dance around on stage (no, not Les Savy Fav, stay on topic). "2012" is definitely an acquired taste. If you enjoy Deerhoof's "Milk Man" or drinking room temperature paint, this is all you. Even if you don't like them, they'll still make your ass shake like you're in an earthquake inside of the freshest jazz club in town.
krecs.com/oldtimerelijun

Pete Soyer

Hudson Bell
When the Sun is the Moon
(Monitor)

Hudson Bell opens "When the Sun is the Moon" with a moody swell of grungy guitars. It sounds the way you feel when you know you have to do something that is going to hurt. "Slow Burn" then floats through a Dinosaur Jr. inspired seven minutes of bliss. The secret to Hudson Bell is the way they mix their influences to create an indie-pop sound that still sounds fresh in a sea of indie-pop fish. Classic rock pushes the guitar into fuzz for most of the album, while the punk and grunge elements keep the songs grounded, not letting them get bigger than they need to be. Hudson Bell will make you nostalgic for the seventies and the nineties at the same time, even if you were born in the eighties.
upperworks.com

Pete Soyer

Barcode
Showdown
(Nuclear Blast)

Like bullets fired from a machine gun, the sixteen tracks on this album come at you with incredible speed. Barcode give all elements of good hardcore to you in spades with fast, short, and energetic songs. A few metal elements, such as heavy chugging riffs, pop up on occasion to break up the monotony. Sure, all the tracks sound the same but when they are good it doesn't really matter.
barcodehardcore.dk

Justin Wittenmeier

Unearth
Our Days of Eulogy
(Eulogy)

Unearth is the definition of metalcore. And rightly so. This Massachusetts band helped define the term with their brethren Shadows Fall and Killswitch Engage. Despite the scene choking on its own bastard spawn of endless imitations, the original masters of the old school metal melded with the east coast hardcore show why they dominate with the release of "Our Days of Eulogy". A cross between a live disk and rarities disc, the offering is this: Five live tracks, the 4 song "Endless" EP and their hard to find first release, the 4 song "Above the Fall of Man" EP. Round out your Unearth library nicely with some live tracks. Its bands like this that saved metal from getting too 'nu' and we can't thank them enough.
eulogyrecordings.com

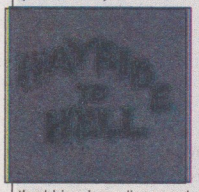
Bushman

Levy
Rotten Love
(One Little Indian)

Give Interpol some Prozac, sit them on a carousel and watch them turn into Levy. Equal parts of The Stills upbeat somber pop and Interpol's slit-your-wrists melodies come flowing through "Rotten Love." Their second single "On the Dance Floor" isn't really made for the dance floor. It is made for sitting on your fire escape on New Years Eve and watching people dancing in the street below you. "She said I will take you home" keeps repeating in the song before James Levy raises his voice to carry the listener home too. Levy is running strong by staying upbeat and keeping the smiling façade up for everyone who is tired of slitting their wrists. But it's like a fake smile at a funeral, everyone knows how sad it is and the smile isn't fooling anyone.
levytheband.com

Pete Soyer

Hayride to Hell
"...And Back"
(Hairball 8)



So this was clearly the month when Hairball 8 decided to empty their shelves and ship all their psychobilly nonsense to us, the good folks of Modern Fix. "...And Back" is yet another offering from Hairball 8's expansive-yet-specific fold, combining cartoony violent images with throbbing bass lines and cowtown punk beats. While it's far from anything markedly different as far as the genre goes, Hayride to Hell still manage to infuse a little originality in a movement that could obviously use a bit of a boost. "She's My Witch" and "Demon Seed" are great examples of psychobilly done right, full of gusto and unapologetic fun.
hayridetohell.com

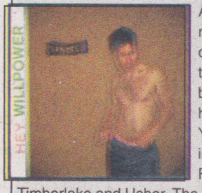
Brian Greenaway

Gravity Propulsion System
Get Destroy
(Ascetic)

"Get Destroy" is a piece of high-end art that looks like a bunch of black dots at first glance, but when you look closer you realize that it is actually a picture of a computer taking over the world through the silent installation of micro-chips in peoples' toes. On first listen, "Get Destroy" comes across as noisy, thrashy, chaotic no-wave punk. But keep listening and one will see that everything is actually interconnected over and over making the wall of noise virtually impenetrable. From ...Trail of Dead to Laura Lee, Gravity Propulsion System would win in a schoolyard brawl any day. The first track, "What Can I Say" slams into the listener from the first second. There is no waiting around for something to happen, Gravity Propulsion System is at full speed from the first second to the last.
gravitypropulsionsystem.com

Pete Soyer

Hey WillPower
Self-Titled EP
(Cochon)



As indie music gets more and more mainstream, we see musical borders diminish little by little, sometimes for the good, but mostly for the bad. Imperial Teen's Will Schwartz has teemed up with friend Tomo Yasuda to form Hey WillPower, an indie answer to mainstream Pop and R&B acts in the vein of Justin Timberlake and Usher. The bedroom made computer beats and ridiculous lyrics are intended to be comical and mocking, but instead seem just plain ridiculous. In summary, the faux-dance, mock R&B thing was mildly funny when Har Mar Superstar did, but the same joke can't be told twice.
willpowermusic.com

Gabe Abaud

Saxon Shore
The Exquisite Death of Saxon Shore
(Burnt Toast Vinyl)

In the genre of post rock, there are (just as in any other genre) a few 'big names.' Either you are on the Godspeed/Mt. Zion side of things, with haunting atmospherics and quasi-psycho-political leanings that bring the listener to the end of themselves, or you are on the Mogwai side, making amazingly complex post-rock that lulls the listener into gentle submission. The newly reformed trio, Saxon Shore denies this bifurcation. They take lush and intense melodies, created with both acoustic instrumentation and electronics, and produce some of the most fresh and new instrumental rock that has been seem since bands like the aforementioned powerhouses. Many of the tracks have such an emotional weight to them that they have the imprint of a keen soundtrack artist such as Ennio Morricone or fellow post-rockers Explosions in the Sky. Regardless of the unnecessary comparisons, Saxon Shore is simply making amazing music.
burnttoastvinyl.com

Dave Tow

The Mass
Perfect Picture of Wisdom and Boldness
(Crucial Blast)

Sax-a-ma-phone… Sax-a-ma-phone… Hopefully others get the joke, if not you need to watch more Sunday night television. The Mass would definitely get the joke. How many thrash bands have you heard who can easily fit a saxophone into the mix? My guess is zero. On "Perfect Picture of Wisdom and Boldness" The Mass grinds your face against asphalt for almost a hour with singer Matt Waters pushing your face down even harder with the butt of his sax. It's not a mix many would think of, kind of like plain yogurt and tuna fish (just trust me) but it works. The saxophone takes The Mass above the constant crashing of other indie-thrash bands and sets them apart with their jazz inspired lines sprinkled between angst ridden growls and whipping guitars. The Mass is heavy and will weigh on you all the way through, but it sure beats singing "Sax-a-ma-phone" by yourself when no one will play for you.
crucialblast.net

Pete Soyer

Bane
The Note
(Equal Vision)

Funny how a lot of Bane fans were let down by their latest, "The Note". But, then again, people are idiots. It's a strong album, through and through, combining the best aspects of the band's earlier material with some newer influences and sounds… kinda more melodic than before, but with those vein-pulsing screams intact. Lyrically, the band is as poignant as they ever were, taking the piss out of keyboard bands and reflecting on why they (or any other band, for that matter) have a reason to exist in this day and age. Bane's reason? Fuck shit up, start circle pits, and maybe teach us something along the way. A damn fine album.
banecentral.com

Jason Schreurs

Moreau
Nova Scotia
(One Little Indian)

Moreau is soft, soulful, elegant and right up my parents' alley. I think I'll mail the CD to them as soon as this review is finished. Piano tinkles grace the songs like the unnecessary garnish on top of my steak at some fancy restaurant. The ballads are heartfelt with great vibratos flowing through the brushed snare and Phil Collins-esque synthesizer. And just when you are almost completely lulled into a synth stupor, they throw in about 10 seconds of rock to let you know they aren't completely lame. They have been called classy and swoonsome which is exactly what they are, if you're looking for something that makes you feel ten years older. So forty and fifty-somethings get in line, you'll be the envy at bingo when you come in with this hip new band that all the young kids are talking about.
onelittleindian-us.com

Pete Soyer

The Duskfall
Lifetime Supply of Guilt
(Nuclear Blast)

You already know what this sounds like, more or less, if you've heard one Swedish semi-melodic death metal band, then you've heard them all, again, more or less. If it's your thing, then you should hang this band up in your thing-closet right along side some of your other favorite things. Growly death metal vocals, thrashing heavy guitar riffs, sweet, yet somewhat cold and aloof melodies woven in over the top and a rock steady rhythm section that doesn't resort to easy tricks like blast beats to crank up the aggression factor are the staple elements of every song on this ten song record. Nice even number ten: one track for each one of your fingers unless you're a crack baby or victim of an industrial accident or just a hideous mutant freak. "Life time supply of guilt." I'm assuming these bastards are Catholic.
nuclearblastusa.com

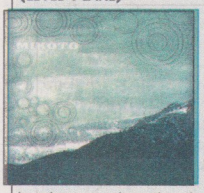
DICK

Killing the Dream
In Place Apart
(Deathwish)

This is one of the best bands playing straight-forward powerful hardcore these days. On this album they rock hard and basically take fast, old school style hardcore to the next level by injecting a technical element and diversity of sound rarely found in earlier hardcore releases. The songs never grow stagnant and the guitar work is continually impressive; they pull off some great riffs without heading into metal territory. With most of the tracks under two minutes, they get straight to the point with no filler. Another thing this album has going is that it never gets repetitive; the songs have certain aspects in common, like fast riffage and intense screams, but each track maintains its own identity.
killingthedream.com

Matt Walker

Mikoto
Self-Titled
(Level-Plane)



On their debut EP, Mikoto demonstrate their talent for making metal-tinged hardcore balanced out by melodic backing vocals and catchy choruses. It's definitely well-executed but it all sounds very familiar. The blueprint for this type of hardcore has been done to death in the past couple of years, so when a band comes along that does a good job, it just isn't as exciting. The heavier parts sound great; Ray Harkins has awesome screaming vocals, but when it comes to the obligatory melodic singing, the songs just lose their momentum and sound like MTV-core.
mikotomusic.com

Matt Walker

Elliot
Photorecording
(Revelation)

A snapshot of a band, preserved for the fan. This is the last Elliot release. Packaged with a DVD documenting their last tour, the CD is essentially a 'Greatest Hits' re-recorded by the band. For those unfamiliar, Elliot creates ethereal, drifting, shoegazer indie rock that is so soft and full of melody, one dare use the word 'beautiful'. But make no mistake, Elliot are not wussed out emo, rather, a group who is beyond talented at creating hauntingly elite melodies and wrapping them in hook laden pop structures. The end result is grand and words fail the overall splendor of sound Elliot creates. The disc pulls from their entire Revelation Records released catalog (their debut "U.S. Songs", through "False Cathedrals" and from their final release "Songs in the Air"). A comprehensive gathering of their career, rerecorded and produced to leave the world with the exact impressions intended by the band. Elliot had a lot of heart and wore it on their musical sleeve. Listen, for they earned it.
revelationrecords.com

Bushman

Left Alone
Lonely Starts & Broken Hearts
(Hellcat)

Hellcat Records has always been renowned for their ability to dig these stomper old school punk bands out of the cellar and into that Westbeach studio that someone on Epitaph must own. While Left Alone clearly show signs that they are on that same path, there's just something missing. The songs are fast and relentless, the guitars are crunchy and delivering little more than four chords at a time creating an atmosphere just a smidgen cleaner than say, The Casualties. It's like, the perfect formula. And that's the problem. "Lonely Starts & Broken Hearts" seems to be too perfect, calculated, methodical. As if someone really did figure out just the right mix of everything to make the band seem crustier than they actually are yet crisp enough to appeal to the curious kids wanting to freak out their parents. All in all, this effort is strong but the conviction and sincerity just doesn't find its way through.
hell-cat.com

Keith Carman

Racebannon
(The Inevitable) Singles and Rarities (97-05)
(Alone)

Post-hardcore has never tasted this good. Racebannon has been assaulting people for over nine years and show no signs of slowing, even if they die. "The Inevitable" is a two disc set that chronicles their seven inches, compilation tracks and just rare gems they threw on to please the die-hard fans. If you haven't been punched in the face by Racebannon and this is your first trip to their land of bastardism, "The Inevitable" is a great introduction. From the lulling screams in "The Killer" to the Black Sabbath and Sonic Youth covers, Racebannon is all about opening their arms and making you feel at home. You can feel the vocal chords ripping on "Oh, the Guilt." Racebannon has perfected their craft, and "The Inevitable" is an overwhelming example of how they create such an amazing sound out of absolute chaos.

racebannon.net

Pete Soyer

Hellbats
Dark and Mighty
(Hairball 8)

Possibly one of the worst punk albums to hit the streets in quite sometime. With abysmal production value and incredible boring arrangements, "Dark and Mighty" is nothing short of a colossal bore. Seriously, I would rather be at work than listen to this album, it's a chore to get through these tracks. Take these lines from the laughably bad song, "Where is the Wolf" for example: "Three little girls in pink panties / Trapped in a room made of candies / Their old man wasn't a liar / Their house is on fire". Seriously? That's what they came with? Now imagine clumsy little chord progressions over the top of this lyrical mess and you're got yourself a real waste of time.

hairball8.com

Brian Greenaway

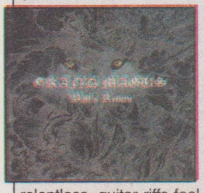
?uestlove
?uestlove Presents: Babies Makin' Babies, Vol. 2
(BBE)

The drummer extraordinaire from The Roots moonlights as a DJ, and while this mix doesn't show his party-rocking talents behind the decks, it's a testament to his skill as a selector. In commemoration of Valentine's Day this compilation gathers some obscure 60's and 70's gems from the likes of The Ohio Players, Al Green, The Delfonics and Natalie Cole. The theme here is heartbreak, and these classics have it in spades. As the exact opposite of his DJ sets, this is what you put on when you've been dumped, and want to have a reason to bust out a pint of Ben & Jerry's and cry yourself to sleep.

bbemusic.com

Jesse Mann

Grand Magnus
Wolf's Return
(Rise Above)

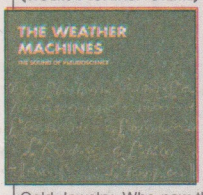


Their third kick at the can in four years, Wolf's Return finds power metal dudes Grand Magnus reaching every closer to the world of Fates Warning and all of those bands you wish you'd forgotten about from the heyday of hair metal. Overall, the guts and drive of this album is nothing less than phenomenal. Beats are relentless, guitar riffs feel like being crushed under the wheels of a semi and when you put it all together, it spells whiplash. Unfortunately the operatic vocals bring forth images of Fabio-esque dudes with flowing locks crooning away on top of some mossy cliff as their pirate blouse sways in the wind. That's something I'd expect from a Harlequin novel, not bombastic metal.

grandmagnus.com

Keith Carman

The Weather Machines
The Sounds of Pseudoscience
(Tigers Against Crime)

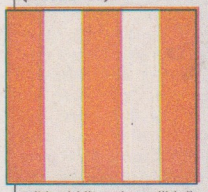


The Weather Machines hail from a hotbed of indie-pop. I'm sure some of you reading this are sitting in this hotbed right now. Many bands have called it home and many more have yet to spring from its loins. No, not Omaha dummy. Rapid City, South Dakota! Home of Mount Rushmore, the Reptile Gardens and Black Hills Gold Jewelry. Who new that such great hook laden pop could come out of South Dakota (or either Dakota for that matter)? The Weather Machines easily give Ted Leo and his gang of pharmacists a run for their greenbacks while still inventing their own sound throughout "The Sounds of Pseudoscience". From "Old School vs. Liberty Girls" to "Me Too Iguana", The Weather Machines have developed a scientific process to churn out sweet pop that is easy to swallow and works well on repeat. Check them out and go visit South Dakota for more aspiring musicians. It's the "Mount Rushmore State"!

theweathermachines.com

Pete Soyer

Brad Adkins
Big Red
(Marriage)



Are you lonely? Do you need a built in friend to talk to you about jellyfish? Car crashes? B-boys? Britney Spears? If you're sitting at home in your bedroom and only leave to pick up your monthly copy of the Fix we have the best suicide-prevention CD of the year. Brad Adkins has come out with a 39 minute CD of just him talking! His voice will lull you to sleep. His endearing questions will reassure you that your self-esteem is still intact. His leaps in subject will make you realize that your train of thought isn't the only one way off track. Adkins is always asking you to reassure his thoughts by saying "You know what I mean?" and you can always respond, "Yeah, Brad, I know what you mean." From the physics of karaoke and why people subject themselves to such embarrassment to Marlon Brando's death, Adkins has the answers, the friendship and the voice you've been longing for.

charmbracelet.org/bard.htm

Pete Soyer

Elegion
The Last moment
(Dark Symphonies)

Huh. For a darkly morose goth metal band, the first song is interestingly enough about a final flickering of regret in, catch this, "the last moment" before death after slicing the wrists open with a knife. It's quite a passionate song imploring the listener not to waste their time away with lingering constant thoughts of death. It's really very beautiful and touching even if the gloom suffused in the music isn't doing a lot towards making me not want to slice my wrists open. The second track, "Scars" is a soulful plunge into ballad country that starts with a solo piano which is joined by clean female vocals and a violin that sheds tears. It isn't metal, but never fear, metallion, they hop right back to it. It doesn't take a fifteen year old in white face powder, dressed all in black to tell you that this is brilliant. Violin, cello and acoustic guitar all butt in on metal's usual suspects to create a moving piece of work.

darksymphonies.com

DICK

Sunn0)))
Black1
(Southern Lord)

This isn't music so much as the most terrifying shit the Jaycees could ever dream to play at their Halloween haunted house maze. Whether or not I like this (or even agree that it is music) is irrelevant. The fact is that Sunn0))) are expressing themselves in a unique aural fashion that transcends current conventions. They strive to express meaning on their own terms, and they do so in a disturbingly authentic manner. The layers of white-ish noise, distant grinding guitars, synthesized squeals and strained human voices on the edge of vocalization could be described as the sound rupturing through a fissure in space and time. If they have a musical heritage it could only be found in Japanese noise acts reinterpreting Black Sabbath and Winter (and to my knowledge that has never happened). They aren't, of course, without precedent; nothing emerges from a vacuum, but this "music" sounds pretty close to what would if it could.

southernlord.com

DICK

The Plastic Constellations
Crusades
(Frenchkiss)

These guys can do no wrong. It was only a matter of time before The Plastic Constellations were gyrating next to Tim from Les Savy Fav and Craig from The Hold Steady while throwing their perfectly calibrated art-punk assault at the masses. "Crusades" sounds the way their CD booklet looks. There are trees on fire, fault lines split open through the earth, volcanoes erupting, tornadoes, lightning, thunder clouds, frozen wastelands, burning houses, holes into demon caves and a phoenix rising above it all. The Plastic Constellations, however, have never fallen so far that they had to rise like a Phoenix, they seem to only get better and stronger with each release. "Crusades" sees them running at full speed and stopping on tip toes before dancing like drunken sailors to the sound of their own drums. Seriously, this will all make sense after you hear the album and can't stop. And come on, even The Hold Steady thinks these guys are good.

theplasticconstellations.com

Pete Soyer

The Bloody Hollies
If Footmen Tire You...
(Alive)

The Bloody Hollies fly right into you like a biker in a bar whose girl's ass you just grabbed. With crunchy guitars and a garage echo sitting as the foundation to everything they do it is a wonder why The Hives were so huge and The Bloody Hollies haven't exploded in the same way. Both bands wear ties, both play explosive rock the way it should be played, but The Bloody Hollies do it with the angst and flair of a million angst wielding kids. "Burning Heart" rolls through two minutes on just three chords and one guitar solo, but it latches on like a leech and will have you humming for days afterward. Like The White Stripes' "Fell in Love with a Girl" The Bloody Hollies know how to be short, sweet and to-the-point. Why waste time with ambient shit when you can get straight to rocking?
bloodyhollies.com

Pete Soyer

Single Minded Pros
From Now On
(EV Productions)

There is a war within the hip-hop worlds right now between the mainstream hip-hop and the underground. The mainstream stuff is just very contrived and showcases not talent, but how cool their video looks for the MTV generation. There is some great hip-hop bubbling up for the underground and this disc from Single Minded Pros is one of them. The brainchild of producer Doc West and DJ Rude, Single Minded Pros provides some slick beats for a silky smooth rhyme flow that sounds just so contagious. High points on this record include "One Over The Cuckoo's Nest" and "Night Strokes". This is hip-hop for those that don't need any crunk juice with it.
singlemindedpros.com

James Wright

Satoshi Tomiie
ES-B
(Saw)

Satoshi Tomiie is known for his impeccably produced progressive house, but here he presents a DJ mix of deeper, more relaxed house ("ES" stands for "Electronic Soul"). The first 22 minutes are three tracks of excruciatingly funkless deep house, the kind of elevator music you might hear on the Weather Channel. Things pick up considerably afterwards, as the range goes funky, then deep, then quirky, then funky again. The mixing is strictly track-to-track, as is typical with CD compilations that are designed to showcase songs. However, more blending would have been nice, as tracks sometimes get drawn-out and repetitious.
satoshitomiie.com

Cosmo Lee

The Messengers
Self-Titled
(Punk Core)

The Messengers are a female-fronted street punk band from Cincinnati. Their debut album is raw and simple with aggressive guitars, melodic hooks and politically charged lyrics. Vocalist Shannon is a cross between Joan Jett, The Distillers and The Donnas, and although her snarl works well on the fast songs it can be a bit shaky on the slower ones. But it's punk rock for punk rockers and the set doesn't discriminate that easily.
themessengers.cc

Chad Bowar

Collabs 3000
Metalism
(Novamute)

I really enjoy electronic music. I do, but one thing that I (as an appreciator of electronic music) accept is that Aphex Twin will never be nearly as huge as 50 Cent or Ashley Simpson. The goal of DJ Speedy J (real name) as Collabs 3000 is to do exactly that; make popular electronic music that sounds really cool. However, all he really manages to do is to make gay club dance fodder. Music is fun; even the singer-songwriter and the producer making beats enjoy it. DJ Speedy J I'm sure takes his cheesy synths really seriously. I mean he is the 28th best DJ on the world (according to DJ Magazine). Also, if he's trying to go for the whole robotic-metallic theme, he needs to take a seat and hear about a little group called Kraftwerk. That, or he can get a new shtick, if there's a job for the 28th best DJ in the world.
novamute.com

Dave Tow

The Cribs
The New Fellas
(Wichita)

Dude, these guys had their music on The OC, so you know they're alright by me. Yeah, I watch The OC - so what? The girls are hot and Seth Cohen is the best TV character since...shit, I don't know, but he's good. And so are The Cribs. The most obvious comparisons are The Strokes and even Hot Hot Heat, but The Cribs take it a step further with a tongue-in-cheek swagger that belies their youth. If jangly guitars are cock-sure (love that word) vocals are your things, then this one is definitely for you. Alcohol fueled and full of lyrics like, "You know there's no one to tell us no" and "Get your dignity and leave", "The New Fellas" is freaking good.
thecribs.com

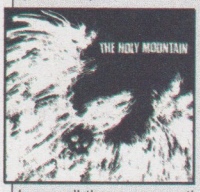
Brian Greenaway

The Concretes
Layourbattleaxedown
(Astralwerks)

The Concretes are from Sweden. I used to go out with this girl from Sweden...no, shoot, it was Switzerland. Anyway, "Battleaxe" is an amalgam of B-sides and rarities compiled from this one-too-many-glasses-of-wine-art-rock band. Singer Victoria Bergsman's voice has a certain Mazzy Star quality to it, leaving one with a loaded, woozy feeling throughout. Combining bits of traditional Swedish music with classic rock instruments and the addition of organs, saxophones, etc, allows for a truly unique mesh of cultures and sounds. Surprisingly effective string-sections also make several appearances, the most notable of which is on, "Lady December", a track that should make it onto your "download next time you're on line" list.
astralwerks.com

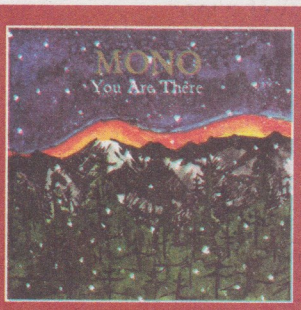
Brian Greenaway

The Holy Mountain
Entrails
(No Idea)



Led by the pummeling vocals of Dan (from Combatwoundedveteran) this band cranks up their amps to unfathomable volume in an early Poison Idea, Japo-Scandinavian grind fashion. Perhaps this kind of unrelenting punk/hardcore would be better suited to a 10-minute EP rather than a 28-minute opus, but considering how well these songs stick to the craw and the band's willingness to keep up the tempo, it's damn hard to complain. Biting political lyrics are just the icing on the cake. Careful though, there's a 10-inch dagger hiding in the middle.
theholymtn.com

Jason Schreurs



MONO
You Are There
CD / 2xLP / TRR98

THE LADIES
They Mean Us
CD / LP / TRR95

CAROLINE
Murmurs
CD / TRR97

EXPLOSIONS IN THE SKY
How Strange, Innocence
CD / TRR85

the temporary residence ltd.
po box 60097 brooklyn ny 11206
www.temporaryresidence.com

Embrace Today
We Are the Enemy
(Deathwish)

Expectations are high for any new release on Deathwish these days. This label steadily releases some of the best hardcore around right now. Perhaps that's part of the reason why the new album by Embrace Today is a bit of a letdown. Sorry, but the standard chugga-chugga hardcore just isn't a style that the years have treated kindly. While bands like Hatebreed and Sworn Enemy still find relative success, others like Embrace Today tread the muddy waters of riff-heavy, breakdown hardcore. The lyrics are well written and the booklet design, courtesy of label owner and Converge vocalist Jacob Bannon, is phenomenal but, when all is said and done, this one's a dull bag of nails.

xembracetodayx.com

Jason Schreurs

Voltage
Building the Bass Castle Vol. 1
(Flameshovel)

Voltage will not give you song titles or directions to Camp Gay, but they will give a solid 35 minutes of the soundtrack to the city where Bass Castle resides. Like a beacon of hope for musicians Bass Castle rises above all genres with its foundation reaching miles into the earth. When the bass flows, everyone feels it and the music is united. At least that's what I'm getting from this. Playing as the poor-man's Mogwai, Voltage lets out eight tracks, sans vocals, that dip and swoop every way they can to create a soundscape that creates pictures in the listener's mind. The sound is great and the home-made instruments are amazing (a drum-complete with built in laptop, motors and microphones) but the Bass Castle just isn't where I want to set up camp. Maybe on Vol. 2 when all the jesters and kings have moved into Bass Castle, but so far it feels a little empty.

voltage.camp-gay.org

Pete Soyer

Copperpot
Chapter 7
(EV)

It seems like lately hip hop has become more and more about the beat makers than the MC's. Chicago's Copperpot joins the list of highly talented producers maxing melodic and intricate beats. On this release he is joined by such MC's like Braintax and Longshot and manages to create a smart and eclectic album. Hopefully Copperpot will join the other innovative producers coming out of the windy city and receive mainstream attention.

copperpot.cc

Gabe Abaud

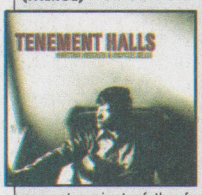
Mad Marge and the Stonecutters
Self-Titled
(Hairball 8)

Don't you wish there was a sequel to "Goonies"? Seriously, one of the greatest movies ever, you know if it'd been released today they'd already be planning at least two or three more. Instead of Large Marge we're stuck with her less talented yet equally creepy sister, Mad Marge and her band of psychobillies. MM and her Stonecutters do a good job of churning out the double bass fun, requisite horror movie-esque songs about murder, death and trouble in tow. One of the best things about this ten-track LP is that it never gets too full of itself. You know how sometimes bands really start thinking they're badass and they start going way over the top and trying to do things they're neither musically nor lyrically capable of? You won't run into that here. Instead, you'll be treated to Marge's full-figured voice and the roaring din that it accompanies. Enjoy.

stonecuttersmusic.com

Brian Greenaway

Tenement Halls
Knitting Needles and Bicycle Bells
(Merge)



A one-man-band isn't what it used to be. There is no bass drum with straps, cymbals between knees or trumpets mounted at mouth level. One-man-bands these days have the advantage of Pro Tools with multi-tracking to make it sound like there are five people backing them up. So it is with Tenement Halls, the newest project of the former frontman for the Rock*A*Teens Chris Lopez. Lopez has increased the pop meter on "Knitting Needles and Bicycle Bells" but has also increased the fog level. Every song is so murky that it is hard to hear what is really going on. Organs and pianos hang on and on and wear out their welcome. There is a line when ambience becomes a distraction and Lopez hasn't found that line yet. "Knitting Needles…" is going in the right direction, but until you can sit and enjoy everything that is going on instead of just the drone of an artsy organ, Tenement Halls has a long way to go.

mergerecords.com

Pete Soyer

Honky
Balls Out Inn
(Small Stone)

Goofy stoner rock that could be straight out of Dazed And Confused, Honky are all about the tongue-in-cheek, multiple vocalists and overly-fuzzy guitar that sounds almost like static. Still, it provides some thick grooves and ensures that the work of Fu Manchu and Nebula will never die. In fact, it might actually make them even more popular. Strong but not serious enough to really take a stronghold of the listener, these guys could do more with their songs than tired shit like, "Love To Smoke Your Weed". It's obvious that with these solid rhythms and moderate influx of Lynyrd Skynyrd that they're paying close attention to musical detail. Now if they could actually come up with a good album title, get those female singers involved a few more times and throw down the boogie rock without the comedy, they'd fuckin' tear.

smallstone.com

Keith Carman

Nine Pound Hammer
Mulebite Deluxe
(Acetate)

A lovely re-pressing of the earliest recordings of country punk rock 'n' rollers Nine Pound Hammer, the band that preceded (but has since become infamous for the connection to) Nashville Pussy thanks to main man Blaine Cartwright. In fact, one could make many comparisons between the two but it's rather obvious as to who would come out on top. In retrospect, these primal, vitriolic, acidic gems harken to the power and brute force of early Motorhead as reinterpreted by hicks raised on a steady diet of shit-kickin' music. Not how it's cool today though (cough, the "new" Johnny Cash fans), we're talkin' guys that actually knew the names of local dudes who wore 10-gallon hats and spurs. Naturally these tunes sound a bit kitschy/silly and tinny as compared to recent releases but one can't deny the adrenaline and excitement of their fresh attitudes.

acetate.com

Keith Carman

Tortoise and Bonnie 'Prince' Billy
The Brave And The Bold
(Overcoat)

What originally started out as a cover of Bruce Springsteen's classic "Thunder Road" evolved into a full fledged covers album with Will Oldham (aka Bonnie Prince Billy) handling vocal duties, while experimental Chicago rockers Tortoise supplied the backing music behind this lavishly orchestrated album. The album includes covers of songs by the Minutemen, Elton John, Devo, Quix*o*tic and Lungfish just to name a few. The beauty of each track lies in the interpretation of each song, as Tortoise and Oldham managed to create entirely different versions of each respective track. Without a doubt however, that stand out track on "The Brave And The Bold" is the rendition of Springsteen's classic "Thunder Road". The track soars with synthesizers and is brought back down to the freeway with Oldham's strained voice and Tortoise's simplistic backing rhythms.

overcoatrecordings.com

Gordon Downs

The Hatepinks
Plastic Bag Ambitions
(TKO)

Ah, the French… perpetrators of some of the worst fashion/musical/cinematic crimes of this (and last) century. The Hatepinks sadly (because it's more fun to write reviews of music you hate) are good, which means this review will be more about how they remind listeners of the Libertines and even older Stones than it will be about Gerard Depardieu or Jerry Lewis. "Plastic Bag" is thirteen tracks that blaze to completion in just over fifteen minutes and are full of piss and vinegar directed towards pretty much everyone. The beats are raucous and the cymbals are in perpetual motion as Olivier Gasoil's obnoxious voice squawks its way between the guitars. Really, this is an album that should be universally loathed but there's something decidedly fun about it that sort of makes it irresistible, like a celluloid, hairy-armpitted French girl - even though it's there and in your face you sort of dig it. In a weird way.

tkorecords.com

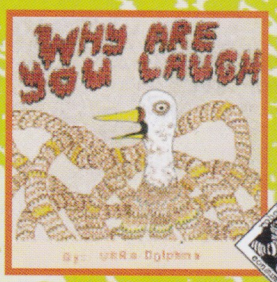
Brian Greenaway

MUSIC FOR SPRING

VARIOUS ARTISTS
BandMomma.com, CD

SOLEDAD BROTHERS
The Hardest Walk
ALIVE 0066, CD/LP

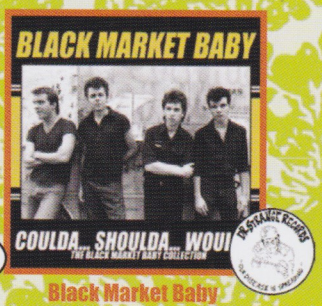
AKIMBO
Forging Steel And Laying Stone
VIRUS 344, CD/LP



ULTRA DOLPHINS
Why Are You Laugh
ROB063, CD

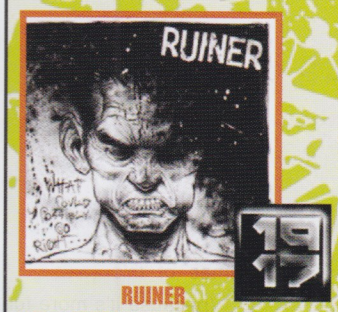
RISE AND FALL
Into Oblivion
DWI50, CD

TWO GALLANTS
The Throes
ALIVE 0054, CD



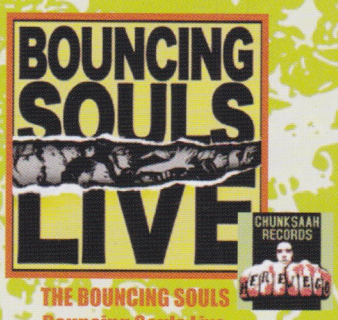
Black Market Baby
Coulda...Shoulda...Woulda...
DSR104, CD

LOKBRA
Army Of Soundwaves
LCD015, CD



RUINER
What Could Possibly Go Right
19R005, CD

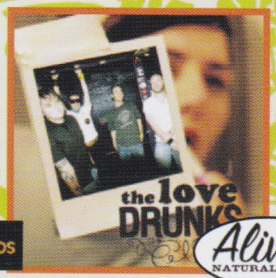
STIMULIS
No Such Thing As Perfect
WAR 007, CDEP



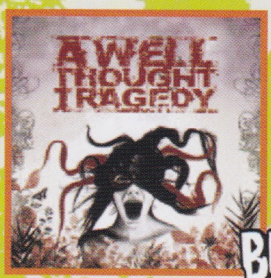
THE BOUNCING SOULS
Bouncing Souls Live
CAR 025, 2xCD

ACROSS FIVE APRILS
A Tragedy in Progress (Re-Issue)
IDI032, CD

FATESGAME
Truth In Scarlett Hands
CD



THE LOVE DRUNKS
s/t
ALIVE 0065, CD



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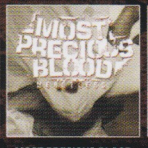

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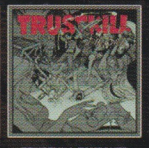

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